

THE WIRE

ADVENTURES IN MODERN MUSIC

ISSUE 163 · SEPTEMBER 97 · £2.00 / US \$5.50

FREE POSTCARDS INSIDE
Autechre
Jah Wobble
Stereolab
FREE POSTCARDS INSIDE*

Sun Ra special

Val Wilmer and
John F Szwed
travel the
spaceways

Current 93 industrial folklore

ROBERT WYATT

The great awakening

Terre
Thaemlitz

Van Dyke
Parks

Ornette
Coleman
*on stage
with Lou
and Laurie*

Stock,
Hausen &
Walkman
samplers
over Salford

Silver Apples
electronica's missing link

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your monthly exploration of new music

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Tel: 0171 429 6422 • Fax: 0171 282 4287
e-mail: the.wire@isocellive.co.uk

Editor/Publisher **Tony Merrington**

Deputy Editors **Rob Young, Chris Bohn**

Art Editor **Ruth Heavey**

Advertising **Zane Ridsdale-West** (0171 494 1346)

Subscription: **Ben House** (0171 234 3556)

Administrator: **Bon Harrington**

Words: **Jake Barnes, Mike Barnes, Clive Bell, Chris Blackford, Linton Clegg, Richard Cook, John Corbett, Christopher Cox, Brian Duguid, Phil England, Kevine Edwards, Mark Espiner, John Eversley, Matt Fytche, Steven Gray, Edny Hamilton, Steve Holly, Simon Hopkins, David Ilic, Sasha Frere-Jones, David Keenan, Rahman Khanam, Nick Kimberley, Bob Koopl, Art Lange, Howard Mandel, Peter McLennan, Andy Medhurst, Bill Moatspeerry, The Owen, Tim Pannier, Edwin Penney, Simon Reynolds, Ben Ridge, Robin Rhind, Jonathan Romney, Paul Schutte, Iain Scott, Peter Shapiro, Clute Sharp, Mark Shuker, Paul Sturz, Julie Tanaka, David Toop, John L. Walker, Ben Watson, Razzy Witherspoon.**

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Distribution

UK & Europe

USM Distribution

86 Newman Street

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Tel: 0171 396 8000

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USA

Eastern News

Distributors

250 West 55th Street

New York, NY 10019 USA

Tel: 212 649 4484

USA newsstand queries call:

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Founder **Anthony Wood**

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editor's Idea

Back in the office then, after five weeks of paternity leave, a period during which my interest in the diabolical manoeuvrings at the wild fringes of contemporary music slumped to an all time low.

While it should come as no surprise that the rigours of the first weeks of fatherhood and the desire to keep pace with the stuff that forces this magazine's inexorable monthly march into the wide blue yonder are mutually exclusive occupations, there did occur a harmonic convergence of sorts between the needs and demands of my brand new days-old daughter and one particular corner of the familiar CD collection.

Now don't fret, I'm not about to metamorphose into a born-again baby-bore, and fill this column each month with dewy-eyed blow-by-blow accounts of Ruby's rapid, wonder-inducing progress from a very vocal胚 at the sharp end of the food chain to something approximating the status of a responsive human being — but indulge me just this once, this has got relevance (as the Americans might say).

So anyway, there I was, playing the part of the caring-sharing father, determined to do my bit, pouring through a mini-library of baby literature, trying to get to grips with current medical thinking as regards little Johnny's feed patterns, sleep patterns, desired stool consistency (oh yes), trapped wind, weight gain, hair loss, my head spinning from what appeared to be contradictory advice coming in fast from all sides (baby-rearing, you soon realise, is not an exact science, just like music criticism, in fact contributors to this month's Letters page please note). Then I came across a report of research into the calming effects of high-volume white noise on your screaming new-born. At last, I thought, here was some infant wisdom I could get to.

White noise in this context was defined as the sound of washing machines, hoovers, blenders and other humble domestic appliances going about their methodical business. Somewhat impractical, the new parent might think, having to run the wash-wash cycle on the Zanussi at three in the morning in order to lull Junior back into the arms of Morpheus. I, on the other hand, felt perfectly placed to act on this particular piece of scientific endeavour. After all, I might be a little hazy on the exact words to "Baa Baa Black Sheep", "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star" and other infant-soothing nursery rhymes of my own childhood (although in light of the month's Current 93 story, I now know that I should have consulted David Tibet in order to cure this strangely troubling instance of

memory loss), but my CD towers positively hum with music which attempts to replicate the sound of a RoboCat whining its way through the heart of an innocent arachnid.

So there I was again, as the small hours approached, newly armed with all the equipment necessary to enable Ruby to go softly through that dark night: disposable nappies, industrial strength nappy sacks, cotton wool balls, nappy cream, dummy, change mat, fluffy toy, and, waiting silently in the CD tray, a copy of *Stuff Drones 97* by Bill Puke Anal Grinder.

Unfortunately, I neglected to account for the additional stress levels that can be piled on top of the already soul-wrenching screams of a two-day old baby by music constructed exclusively from the amplified sounds of a blunt chisel saw dismembering the contact-mixed carcass of a freeze-dried Yak. Turn it off, turn it on, came the cry from the bedroom, as Ruby howled in my arms and the Puke (as they are known to hardcore aficionados) launched into their singular version of that classic monochord electro-cocktail, "48 Hour Blood Beach Trepanning Party". Momentarily crestfall, but still determined to test out the white-noise-as-arab-pacific theory, I searched the CD racks for a less concussing example of the art of Minimalist composition, select the recent issue of a 1968 live performance of Terry Riley's *Papay Agogoo And The Phantom Bond All Night Flight*, whack the volume into the red, and hey presto, it does the trick! Terry's saxophone spins hypnotic arabesques through the Time Lag Accumulator and Ruby drifts from a state verging on hysteria into a place of almost hypnagogic calm.

A few days later, still smug in the knowledge that my daughter's taste in music is already on a par with that of an advanced *Wire* reader, I take a phone call from an in-law undergoing baby-sitting duties for the afternoon. How is she, I ask. Fine, now that she's stopped crying. She's been crying? How did you stop her? I put some music on. I let the muscles in my stomach knotting as I ask, slowly, What music? John Denver, comes back the satisfied reply.

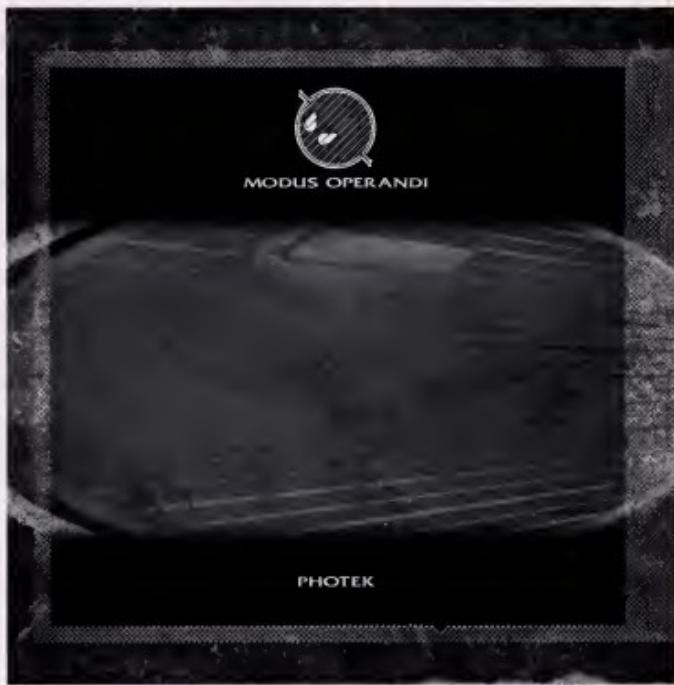
This issue we say "Don't be a stranger" to Vanessa Smith, who is visiting the magazine's advertising desk after two year's dedicated service. In her place, we welcome Anne Hilde Neset, straight outta the colds of Norway into the hottest seat in the office.

TONY MERRINGTON

The October 97 issue of The Wire
Revealing the parts other music magazines fail to reach
On sale Tuesday 30 September

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THE ALBUM



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SCIENCE

soundings

september

Selected highlights of the month's live events, happenings, club spaces and broadcasts

Festivals/Special Events



A Guy Called Gerald

Digital Slam 2 An intercomments live jam as part of this month's Camden Mix season, featuring an international session via ISDN and video links hosted by Digital Diaspora. Long-distance slams take place on 22 and 23 September, hooking up artists in London, Paris, New York, Johannesburg and Los Angeles. On-line musicians include Talvin Singh's Anokha crew, Vernon Reid and Marque Gamble, DJ Sooppy, Grooverider, A Guy Called Gerald, Steve Williamson, and South Africa's Joburg Streets. The UK end of the event takes place at London Dingwalls, full information from Camden Arts Services 0171 911 1648, or go to the Digital Oscuras website: <http://www.digoscara.co.uk>

New York Session II Festival of accordion music, ranging across jazz, Nuevo Tango, Cajun and Finnish avant-garde takes place along the South Bank and Canary Wharf (10-13 September). Under its umbrella a number of accordion virtuosos will be making their London debuts, among them the young Finn Kimmo Pospinen, who has been described as the Jim Hendrix of accordion music. Madagascar born Raja Gauva, Louisiana's Eddie Leyune, Argentinian bandoneon player Juan José, and French jazz accordionist Richard Galliano. Various times and venues, £18-£50, booking information on 0171 960 4242.

KingWeekender A weekend of back-to-back subversive cinema, video, performance, words and music, presented by the Chamber of Pop Culture, featuring rare British

appearances by the likes of US painter and performance artist Joe Coleman, Hardcore writer Dennis Cooper, underground photographer Nan Goldin, 2 grade film maker Nick Zedd, cartoonist The Pizz, plus Japanese audio-visual provocateur Mochi Kuwahara and deadly Fnn Jira Tenor. Meanwhile, the home front is kept up by Bruce Gilbert, Malcolm McLaren, avant-garde BlaB First duo Smith + Stenger, independent film maker Brian Griffin and DJ Giles Peterson. London House Hospital, Colmore Row, WC1, 26-28 September, information 0171 833 3644.

Kondescope Techno The city of Graz, Austria, kicks off autumn with Kondescope, a two part heavy Techno fest running on various dates through to the end of October. "Technologi" (nostalgia, hedonism, body, society, dissidence) and other Techno-related fields investigated in workshops, lectures, courses and dance nights. Electro Lab, Reutte (Sequenzerhalle), K-Rock, CHIX Crew etc. and Underground Resistance (Rolanda, Suburban Knight and Teknotek) take over a floor each of the Phoneminstut. Kirchengasse 1, Graz, 27 September. For more details and events during October tel 031 316 8230007, or fax 835788 or check the website at: <http://www.kondescope.at/kondes.htm>

Savage! The Savage Pencil exhibition of ink collage portraits of musicians (some of which featured in The Wire), ranging from John Cage to Sonic Youth and The Sex Pistols, has been rescheduled. It now runs from 25 September-

26 October at Intoxica, 231 Portobello Road, London W11, 0171 228 8010.

Plane True Music Festival A range of contemporary classical music events spanning three weekends in London opens with the piano compositions of Keith Barnard (London Sherer Theatre, 35 Park Road, NW1, 21 September). 3pm. Later the same day, the same venue premieres two works by James O'Angelo. On 28 September (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, WC1) you can hear female vocal quartet Rose Voices (3pm) and John Tilbury commemorates the tenth anniversary of Morton Feldman's death (7.30pm). More events follow in every October. For full information tel 0171 732 4624.

The Body Electric/Guitarevolution Canadian touring New Music festival for the electric guitar, organised by Tim Brady, and centred on Toronto and Montreal but taking in Vancouver, Jonquière, Winnipeg, Victoria and New York. Participating artists include David Tom and Tim Brady, The Fred Firth Guitar Quartet, Eight Orchestra (incredibly Canada's best New Music orchestra), Pacific Rim (Paul Dresher, John Oliver and Wes Wharrell), René Lussier and Elliott Sharp, and more. The tour takes place between 25 September-5 October; details on 001 514 489 5946.

On Stage

Gavin Bryars Ensemble Three performances including the premiere of *A Man In A Room*. Comprising performed by the composer's own ensemble and Spanish sculptor Juan Muñoz, at London Media Vale Studios, Delaware Road, London WB, 18-20 September, 8pm, £10.50, 0171 960 4242.

Marilyn Crispell/Barry Guy/Paul Lytton (Holleyweg Improv) the Belfast Crescent Arts Centre, University Road, Belfast, 5 September, 8pm, £12.32, 242 338.

Max Eastley + Ferguson Kelly The sound sculptor and sound artist, respectively, in performance involving improvisation on inverted instruments, video projection and an installation, organised by The Sculptors Society of Ireland. Dublin Arthouse, Curved Street, Temple Bar, Dublin, 5 September, 7pm, £35.25, info 0153 1 872 2364.

Einstürzende Neubauten bring their enlarged line-up to play their only UK show this year, in support of their *Ende Neu Remixed*

album. London Astoria, 7 September, 7pm, £11, 0171 434 0403.

Electroniceige The inaugural concert in a monthly series (hosted by Peter Cusack), working the interface of electronics, Improv and film and video, features music by Paul Schröder, Andrew Hulme and Simon Hopkins, plus Alvarino, Cusack and Max Eastley. Plus films by the artists, and Qung by Future Sound Of Postativity. London Spinn, 109 Commercial St, E1, 17 September, 8pm, £6/9.50, 0171 247 9747.

Matchless Nights Eddie Prevost's label hosts a series of sessions, also at the Spinn (see above), starting with John White's Live Burns featuring a troupe playing batavia driven miniature keyboards, plus The Paul Dunmall Trio with Marco Minassi (double bass) and Prevost (drums) 25 September, 8pm, £7.50, 0171 247 9747.

James MacMillan World premiere of MacMillan's new symphony, Vigil, performed by The London Symphony Orchestra. London Barbican, 28 September, 7.30pm, £10.50, 638 8891.

Mouse On Mass + Hololead Ossendorp's finest Electronica duo add live drums for this short UK visit, plus Schlamppegg/FX, Randomz project in support. London Ongelgasse 16, Soho, London, Camden Crawl (17), London ICA (19, tbc).

Offsheats Film festival at which Randomz performs their performance for "cox from multi spatial piano with garden gnome and snare drum tree sculptures", as well as John Cage's *Water Music*. Other attractions include a workshop performance of Cornelius Cardew's *The Great Learning*, and sets by 100 Violins and Kenny Process Team. Huddersfield Lawrence Bailey Theatre, 12-13 September.

Evan Parker + iinet/finanz One of the master saxophonist's occasional

collaborations with the Newcastle based sonic alchemists, plus DJ Port Authority. London Club Integral (The Spitz, 4 September, 8pm, £7.50, 0171 247 9747).

Rachid & Rex A rare visit to these shores by the American Midwestern post-rock string ensemble. London Coal House, 2 Regents Park Road, Camden, NW1, 22 September, tickets from Stargreen (0171 734 8932) or Rough Trade shops.

Reservoir London's excellent contemporary music ensemble electrolyt Hobson with their

rendition of Stockhausen's *Kontakte*, Xenakis's *Gyöcetes*, plus works by new UK composers. London Conway Hall, 12 September, 7.30pm. £18.50, £18.20 6484

Shakti Three members of the original global fusion outfit – guitarist John McLaughlin, tabla player Zakir Hussain and ghafar player Vilko Vinayakaran reunite, joined by Roush Harprasad Chaurasia for a special four-date tour celebrating 50 years of Indian independence. Oldham Queen Elizabeth Hall



Club Spaces

2:13 Club Daily aimed Improv with Hugh Metcalfe/Gail Brand Quartet, London Library Gallery, Stoke Newington Church St, N16, 6 September, 2-3pm. £14.50, £11.70 79373

Anikha Drum A spin-off source by Talvin Singh from Jagga, table breakdown African rhythms and 90s street music. London Blue Note, Mondays, 10pm-3am, £5/£3, 0171 729 8440

Defunkt Brighton's leading club space expands to two floors, and presents Vienna's Pascik Putzinger and Bojan Vuksan, previews the forthcoming Spunk! Jazz compilation on it, plus DJing from residents Creten Vagel, Nick Space and Flack. Brighton Escape Club, 11 September, 01273 704610

Electronic Lounge Electronica's disparate horizons scan the latest frequencies developed by DJs Scanner, Tony Morley and guest The Underdog. London CA, 2 September, 9pm-1am, £25.00, £21.00 498 3032

Irregular New Manchester night dedicated to ear-piercing noise, gurgling Electronica and, er, old-timer waltzes, kicking off with Prof. Broxburn, Giddy Middocks (Skeml and Matt Wand Stockhausen & Walkman) Manchester 10 Bar, 10 Trafalgar Street, 8pm, 1.45am, free, info 0161 480 5845

Kosmische Krautrock fanatics' night, with live appearance from Horton Jupiter And Joy Disco Kollektiv, and DJ Dave Reckoning. London Upstarts at the Garage, 13 September, 10pm-4.30am, £5/£4, 0171 607 1818

Melting Pot The Merry Pranksters are joined this month by Comerell, Paddington Brooks (Syzman), Vert, Si Begg and Bubba's Rum (4 September), Runaways and Rec (11), Clear DJs with Hidden Agenda and

(24 September), London PRPH (25). Birmingham Symphony Hall (26). Southampton Turner Sims Hall (27)

Silvers Apples The legendary electronic rock pioneers, now reformed plus guests Wendy & Carl, Amo, Azusa Plane, Alpha Stone, Mount Vernon Arts Lab, Saddr Bazaar and Hood at an all-silver at London Garage (14 September, 4pm, 8.30). A national tour follows, taking in Brighton Richmond (15, with Azusa Plane), Sam Fay's Nottingham (16, with Wendy & Carl), London Search (18), and more dates tbc. Info 0181 963 0940

Steeleobal Taking their mobile cabaret pad out on the road, for gigs at Leeds Crockett (25 September), Manchester MOH (26), Nottingham Marco Garvey (27), Glasgow Garage (28), Newcastle Riverside (29). More dates follow in October.

Stevie Wishart A night of electronically treated hurdy-gurdy plus hoodie, drums and voice at the first of a run of a new contemporary music nights at the North London venue London Union Chapel, Compton Avenue, N1, 19 September, 8pm. £7/£5, 0171 226 3750

Diego (18). To Rococo Roll's debut UK performance. London Smithfield, 340 Farringdon St, EC1, 10pm-2.30am. £4/£3, 0171 236 8112

Metra Underground drum 'n' bass, HipHop, Techno, club, Electronica and jazz, with regular Micro DJs. London Cline, 19 September, 10pm-4am, £6, 0171 792 5478

Mukatsuka Big beat business, with guest DJs OJ Victim (9 September), and Hal from Clear Records (13). London Civic, fortnightly Tuesdays, 10pm-3am, £4/£3, 0181 560 5133

Phone Listen and learn as Gajanan plays live, and the Wireless crew spin Ambient, jazz, Electronica, drum 'n' bass, post-rock and lo-fi. London Kohl Bar, 11 St Martin's Court, WC2, 26 September, 7-11pm, price £1, 0171 420 5626

PM Scientists Two rooms of deepest, darkest drum 'n' bass and Techno with regular scientists and guests: Bryan Gee and Kirk DeGeorge (3 September), LTL Bassmen and Jason Alper (10). Kemistry & Storm and Dave Tipper (17). DJ S Gachet and Tony Vegas (24). London Smithfield, Wednesdays, 10pm-2.30am. £5/£4, 0171 357 0004

Rumpus Room Adam Freeland delves into some beat matter, plus residents The Merry Pranksters play an eclectic, cut-up tribute to the late William 5 Burroughs. London Arch No 5, Strand Pl, SE1, 26 September, 10pm-3.30am. £18.00, 0181 523 7922

Savage Machine Rootin' wortness from Glasgow's Mount Vernon Arts Lab and Newark (12 September), Rex and Germanics Speaker Bite Me (19), and To Rococo Roll (26). London Hope & Anchor, Upper Street, N1. Fridays, 8.30pm-1am, £4/£3, 0171 351 1443

Radio

National

BBC Radio 1

Andy Kershaw Sundays 8.40-10.30pm World Music from all quarters. Ellis, Hobbs, Ferguson and more. Hosted by John Peel Tuesdays-Thursdays 8.45-10.30pm The best place to keep up with new rock, indie, Techno, Jungle, Electronica, club and the legendary sessions.

One In The Jungle Fridays 10pm-midnight Guest DJs provide head-long breakbeat insanity. Annie Nightingale Sundays 4-6am Called 'eclectic genius' for the après-clubs.

BBC Radio 3

Songs From Satara Sundays 8-27 September 6pm Four part annual documentary of the life of Sun Ra, including interviews, archive recordings, photos and more. Presented by Jeff Nelson.

Rockabilly Fridays 10.45-11.30pm And on Saturday rockabilly stars or contemporary classics. The moonshiners, Donavan and Harmon Brummett (17 September). Guests include Steve Miller, the Stray Cats and the Coasters. Hosted by Mike Readmark (15), masterclasses from IRCA (22), Tom Johnson or the New York avant garde (23).

New And Now Fridays 10-12pm Contemporary music magazine, interviews, record reviews, sessions. This month Fenaghough, Currie etc, in concert (5 September), new Australian composition (12), Graham Ferrer Terry Illinoi and more at the Vale of Glamorgan festival (15), new Scottish music (26).

Jazz In Concert Alternating Saturdays 10.45pm-Tues Modern instruments recorded live. This month The LICO (5 September), John Scofield and Mike Gibbs (13).

Regional

BBC Derby

Soundscapes Sundays 2-3pm Ashley Franklin plays instrumental Electronica, contemporary classical, ambient, music, New Age and Ambient.

BBC Greater London Radio (GLR)

Charlie Gillett Sundays 7pm Rock, roots, ska, World Music, blues, R&B and more.

BBC Lancashire

On The Wire Saturdays 12-2pm Steve Baker's seasonal New Music mix. Plus experimental electronica, out rock, Indie and more.

BBC Merseyside

The Late Late Show Sunday 12.30-2.30am Out rock, psychedelic, Jungle, avant dance, warped Ambient and global gems in layered sequences.

CRIME (Mutiny Keyboards)

The Garden Of Earthly Delights Friday 11pm-Jam Share Quinlan's blend of avant rock to electronic music with lesser known bands.

Kiss 100 FM (London)

Rock City Wednesday 7-8pm Latest drum 'n' bass spun by Kenny Kent and DJ Hyde.

Give It Up Wednesday 2-4pm Specialty recorded sessions and in-studio appearances.

Intelligent Drum 'n' Bass Monday 12-2am Fabio and Grooverider rule the jams.

Solid Steel Soundset 1-3am Mu-earch mayhem from Cubic0 and the Ninja crew.

The Old Cut Zone Sundays 6-8pm Paul Thomas's experimental Ambient, bus and Electronica mix.

Incentives Sundays 11pm-midnight Eclectic soul jazz beats plus Nu and Old School electronic innovations from Prince Tagoe and Glynne Phoenix.

Kiss 102 FM (Birmingham)

Mais Thompson Mondays 10pm-2am Fresh line night soundtrack in a mixed-up, up-tempo style.

Beastie Boys Tuesdays 8-10pm Beastie Boys (KTC and Marcus) plus more.

808 State Fridays midnight from Something for the weekend from the veteran crew.

Alpha Waves Sundays 4-6am Chillout, ambient, exotic and浩室 from Stuart James.

Kiss 105 FM (Yorkshire)

L. Robbie Mondays 8-10pm Drum 'n' bass, plus tracks from his bag of new tunes.

Astrophe Sundays 4-6am Sean Booth and Ross Brown present Deepstage.

Kiss 116 FM (South London)

Stamp As A Weebe Sundays 9.30pm-12am John Kennedy spins our rock, club, Electronica, experimental Ambients, Hip-Hop plus live 90s beats.

Scratch

New York's Silver Apples play live, plus the debut of Mark Clifford's new vocal project Sealstation, and Ojing from Sealstation's Tim Lane Gorilla Spin, 109 Commercial St, E1, 18 September, 7pm-midnight. £16/14, 0171 228 6616

Soulful Sound

Hands across the ocean DJ sets and sessions by Dusseldorf Berlin trio To Rococo Roll, Designer aka Tortoise producer Casey Rice, H.M., and O.J. London 7.30-11pm-midnight. £3.50/£3, 0171 700 7569

Soundings items for the October issue should reach us by **Friday 12 September**

letters

Write to: Letters, The Wire, 45-46 Poland Street, London W1V 3DF.

or fax: 0171 287 4767, or e-mail: the_wire@ukonline.co.uk

Every letter published wins a FREE CD

Beats not working

It can be argued that experimentation — no matter how inadmissible and inimical its discourse might be to laymen's ears — and the radical critique and politics it postulates are neutralised once the familiar grid of repetitive beats is hammered to it. You at *The Wire* contend that Techno is more purposeful, valuable and liberating, and ultimately a more valid musical form than academic experimentation. In my opinion Techno is simply reactionary. A bold statement to make, I know, but as I see it, is inherent fear of dislocation, which is the essence and general direction, innovation, and hence development in the arts, has taken this century, is naturally conducive to the maintenance of order (as embodied in repetitive beats). Discrepancy motivates normalisation. An ever-increasing palette of sounds (food mixers, crockery, etc) does not ensure any true progress, only endless permutations of a basic thematic and structural model.

That is why the music produced by the likes of Cristian Vogel and Panonic, to name two exponents of Intelligent Techno, just doesn't quite cut the mustard. I feel that if they simply did away with the typically chugging chug, they would free the music and themselves as artists in this process. There is nothing reprehensible in beats per se (drum 'n' bass is, after all, incontrovertible evidence to the contrary), only the conservative ideology behind strict symmetry, and the unimaginative way a monolithic, metronomic metre is employed, with the disastrous result of flattening out and emasculating all signs of experimentation. The dismissal of all commercial experimentation by academics is as thoughtless as technophiles' unquestioning veneration of endless repetition — although they did solve Zeno's 'moving immobility' paradox.

Francisco Mons Santiago, Chile

Free to disagree

British improvised music is generally ignored or dismissed by the wider media, and I had assumed that *The Wire* was a continuing supporter and advocate of this music. I was therefore disappointed to read David Keenan's review of *Trio Playing* by Derek Bailey/John Butcher/Oren Marshall (*The Wire* 162): 'I've not had a chance to hear this disc, and it may indeed be a poor example of the genre for all I know, but I can't agree with the other comments in the review.'

Someone who dismisses Barry Guy as gimmicky (one

of the world's greatest bass virtuos) and lauded by Cecil Taylor must be missing something somewhere. Anyone who hasn't yet grasped the greatness of Guy, Butcher, or John Russell probably never will, but I don't see that they are qualified to pontificate on this music.

British and European improvised music has taken a different direction from American free jazz for a very long time, but Keenan still holds to the outdated belief that anything from the other side of the Atlantic must necessarily be bigger and therefore better than the homegrown variety. UK based musicians too numerous to mention — but here's a few: Eddie Prevost, the late John Stevens, Paul Rutherford, Paul Rogers, George Haslam, Nishlulu Bongas Tshai, John Low, Louis Moholo, etc. — have produced free music that is vital and has a social and political conscience. It's preposterous to suggest that these people have nothing to say.

As for the comments about guitarists and beards, they are worth me commenting on — when did the guy last go to a gig? With regards to 'gimmicks', it is your magazine that seems keen on whatever new musical fad comes along, but I hope this doesn't mean that you're betraying the vein of British free music that was one of the original inspirations for the magazine. Maybe David Keenan should write about Techno records and somebody else can give us a proper review of *Trio Playing*.

Mark Goddard London

Tweaking the freak

So the Sheikh of Twink, Brian Eno, appears to hate the CD recording process (*The Wire* 161). Didn't dear Brian have a whole recording career on the break, adding a bit more reverberation to that snare, looping and running that guitar line backwards? Is this some kind of self loathing, Brian? Another point: are these people playing this music live to air for the radio station? Surely it's recorded. Perhaps this is the key, Brian. Stop tweaking and do something pure. Could you do it without an Oblique Strategy? It might shock us all, and we might say wow, Brian, that's great; or then again we might not.

It's too easy to flop somewhere that has the whiff of the exotic and find things that are marvelous. Stop acting like a poisoned pig and enjoy what you have found, without hiding everything else to the sideline.

Hector McLean Errea, Australia

Plato vs Zappa

Once again I have to ask when is Ben Watson going to stop cromising ECM, and in particular Jan Garbarek, at

every opportunity, even when it is totally unrelated to what he is supposedly writing about [Herbie Hancock & Wayne Shorter's 1+1 CD]. *The Wire* 162? The literary diarrhoea which spills from the typewriter of this spiritually challenged (PC enough for you?) anal retentive spoils an otherwise excellent read. The materialist犬me he continues to spout is intellectually bankrupt. He should read "The Parable Of The Cave" in Plato's Republic and think about it, instead of trying to justify Zappa's bigotry and dreaming about the heady days of Leeds in the early 1980s.

Neil Horner Bohem

Popp music debate

Regarding David Thompson's criticisms of Markus Popp (*Letters, The Wire* 162), I should like to set the record straight. Popp doesn't just "delegate the shape and suggestion of a piece of work to the audience", as Thompson claims. On the contrary, Popp creates the sounds that are to be used by the audience and edits them so that they will fit together, which seems to me a far more challenging task than simply producing an audio CD. Furthermore, the fact that Popp regards remixes as outdated shows that he is aware of their limitations. His open-ended system allows users to produce an infinite number of pieces and modify them over and over again, as opposed to the finished remixes that flood the market today.

Rahma Khazan Paris, France

Tit for tat

In reply to Dimyr Godec's letter (*The Wire* 162) concerning the lack of women artists and writers in the magazine recently, I would rather *The Wire* excluded me because they think my work is shit than included me in it because I have tits. I have encountered far more positive discrimination than negative, so stop whining and get back to your ironing.

Vicki Bennett (People Like Us) London

Corrections Issue 162 In *Bites*, we incorrectly stated that Christoph Heemann's brother Andreas Martin founded the Robot label. It is in fact run by Kevin Spencer in Soundcheck, the distributor for Charly. Should have been listed as Koch International. Issue 161 In Adrian Sherwood's Invisible Jukebox, Adrian's resuscitation label is called Pressure Sounds, not Pressure Drop. The 60s reggae cover label referred to should be spelt Pama, not Palmer. □

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Terre Thaemlitz

Queered pitches

"Donning lace and makeup, I sit before my computer and contemplate," wrote Terre Thaemlitz in his sleeve notes to *Die Roboter Rubots*, released last year on the German *Mile Plateau* label. This is not the kind of quote one is accustomed to reading from an experimental electronic composer, but then, Thaemlitz refuses to fit into any formulaic role.

A former New York City DJ with a longstanding interest in electronic music, he produces audio works that exploit the contrasting functions of music as a potent socializing force and a point for subjective release. Though he has been working at the margins of sound manipulation for several years, he's arguably better known for his controversial solo piano adaptations of Kraftwerk compositions (*Collected on Die Roboter Rubots*), which deconstructed over-familiar melodies and opened up a discourse on the fetishisation of the Mensch Machine. And way before chill out rooms opened in New York, Thaemlitz became notorious for his unique intermixing of musical genres and moods.

"I used to DJ New York and North Jersey Deep House in the late 80s and early 90s,"

Thaemlitz tells me during a lengthy e-mail exchange, "at benefits for groups like ACT UP NY and in transgendered



Arcon 2

The darkside beckons

Noel Ram, aka Leon Mar, aka Arcon 2 is the affable half-Liverpudlian, half-Indian producer and engineer responsible for one of this year's most intriguing drum 'n' bass albums. Called *The Beckoning*, it combines exhilarating dancefloor apoplexy with assured, if half-burned, melodic touches that draw on Ram's background as a trained musician and aspiring songwriter. Given its apparent commitment to frenetic polyrhythms and distorted renegade loops, it's ironic that Ram's first exposure to Jungle, which came from sharing studio space with the Reinforced Records crew through the classic dark Hardcore period of 1993-94, left him cold.

"I was hearing all the Hardcore noise coming out of their offices," he says, "and it really didn't interest me at the time. What turned me on was later stuff like Internal Affairs, 'Universal Love' by 4 Hero, and [Goldie's] 'Inner City Life', because it was like, still songs, you know?" Despite his initial indifference, Ram quickly came to see drum 'n' bass as a logical progression, a fertile creative area and a fantastic opportunity. "I just got into the whole thing — it was a very exciting time a couple of years ago and I was just captured by it all. Everybody was saying, it's the next big thing, and I saw an opportunity there to be able to communicate with people. It was song based, with lyrics, but the beats were different — it was refreshing, a good opportunity to make a new start."

The new album owes little to the soul-infected

sex worker clubs. This was when Infektiv's activism was at its peak — when all these diverse and disenfranchised people were coming together to build autonomous and viable communities. Whereas music was previously an experience of isolation, I was determined with house music to find and participate in a real community with similar interests and be happy ever after. The reality, of course, was that I was fired from every job I landed because I refused to play major label records. Ambient clubs started emerging, so that was my entry into the whole Ambient Electronica music industry. By this time I was a lot more sceptical of the homogenising tendencies of 'communities' — especially since Ambient rooms are often tied to the Techno community, which touts meeting pot inclusiveness under the guise of universal humanism, with little allowance for real diversity. 'Openness' is not a logical concept. 'Unity' is the imposition of group identity — impositions of identity involve exclusion as much as they do inclusion."

His first full-length release, *Tranquillizer*, is one of those rare Ambient records whose vaporous drift of elegant harmony goes way beyond the genre's restrictive definitions, to explore the imperceptible and the

cybersons that effected his Jungle baptism, and far more to the possibilities opened up by his exploratory approach to engineering. Mostly taped over a four-week spell in the winter of 1995–96, *The Beckoning* is a stylish object lesson in the eloquence of noise. The title track, something of a darkside anthem in itself, is a case in point:

"I think I just get confused" he laughs. "Things just started to get darker and darker, the more I got into the engineering side of it. It was like, ah, this is good, what can I do with this loop today, how many effects can you put on a break track you can't listen to it any more? That's how *Arcon 2* evolved, it was very much an experimental thing. The thing about *The Beckoning* was purely, let's chop the beats up in as many different ways as we can and still try to retain a groove." Well, it grooves after a fashion, but you'd have to keep your wits about you to dance to its maelstrom of feedback, high-frequency brass and electric cattle-prod basslines.

Despite the brutal force of the title track, *The Beckoning* is hardly a straightforward collection of darkside mash-ups. It bears innumerable subliminal traces of Ram's early musical grounding — evident in both the sinfully organic shape of the record and the smaller details: the gently plucked guitar strings, resonant chimes and curious melodic figures eddying through the currents of noise. "I'm kind of pleased with it as a piece of work," he says. "It's quite listenable. I was trying to make melody out of noise and retain the hooks I've always played music and so when I'm programming I tend to do things from a musician's point of view. The sequencing of the album was obviously informed and definitely stems from the same thing. If you listen to the great albums, they're not just a mishmash of tracks, there's always a theme and a sound running through

intangible. Unlike many contemporary Ambient producers who depend heavily on the fetishistic sound of analogue synthesizers, Thaemitz's interest in technology has resulted in a strictly digital computer studio set-up. His utilisation of alternative technologies reflects his interest in shitting the boundaries of musical genres and challenging conventional notions of 'artistic expression'.

Like Oval, Macrosta and Eiph (Worship The Gitch), he exploits the limitations of his software and hardware, processing a lot of the distortions and glitches which arise from digital synthesis.

"In this way, production occurs through processes which seek to recognise and interact with their own limitations — contingencies of circumstance on macro and micro levels [market development versus my own access to such technologies due to economics, education, etc]. The intent is not to say, 'Music is a political force which can change the world' (promoters do that), but to develop audio which can serve as a metaphor for, and accompaniment to, certain materialist and queer strategies of social interaction, which attempt to accommodate for cultural diversity and social contradictions. And as a strategic metaphor,

them. I felt that this was a way that I could contribute something to drum 'n' bass, you know, I don't think something like this has been done yet."

Tracks like the Hip-Hop tempo "Warp 7/9", the positively isolationist "Wasteland" and the rollercoasting, electrifying "Zorak" hint at fertile areas for future development — but Ram is undecided where to take the project. Sadly acknowledging the damage that fragmentation and purism have done to the scene, he certainly doesn't see himself as being confined by the rules of drum 'n' bass:

"I found it easy to work within a canvas where anything went — the way that as long as you have your bass and your drums, then anything else can be put in there. You just have to spend lots of time processing sounds and looking for special moments. But although I enjoyed doing it, I think I've kind of exhausted it now. There'd be no point in doing a follow-up album the same. I've got to move on to something else. I think everyone feels a bit like that — drum 'n' bass is so broad and there's so many different branches, it's like it's been segregated, diluted before it became anything. You've only got to tune into your pirate radio stations to see what's going on now, and it's all fucking nasty Garage stuff."

Arcon 2's days might be numbered, but it's too early to shut the book on Noel Ram's future. Husing on the next step, he's clearly got plenty of tantalising ideas. "I'm going through an Indian phase at the moment, getting back to my roots. Indians have a really uplifting vibe about their music and they have great ideas, but when it comes to delivering something cred, nine times out of ten there's something missing. I want to try and act as a kind of filter, and end up producing some weird breakout Indian psychedelia. I think that would be quite interesting to do." **CHRIS SHARP** *The Beckoning* is out now on Reinforced (through SRD).

It never purports to universality or any transcendence of the political implications of its conditions of production, distribution and performance."

Though at ease with the limitations of computers, our e-mail exchange was protracted due to a phlegmatic computer that underwent a minor heart attack.

"Computers, operating systems, software, interfaces — they are all developed through very complex socio-economic relationships which are anything but liberating. 'Virtual' worlds are the most controlled and illusory — hence politicised — spaces of all. And any artist which confuses a wide range of parameters for production with increased expressive capability is most likely putting the horse before the cart. Media such as computers do not allow for expressivity. They are the vehicles through which people communicate — and when an artist is ambivalent about their own communicative intentions, throwing them up as universal or humanist contents which can only be exposed through the mediation of computers or other post-industrial devices, then it is the contents of the social conditions which generated their media which dominates and contextualises their actions."



PHOTO: JOE ARROYO

Thaemitz's work consistently questions conventional applications of music toward transcendental escapism. With recent remakes of Seven Souls (Matañ's legendary collaboration with William Burroughs), *The Golden Palominos* and *Hansum Hosono*, plus a new solo computer project *GRLR* (a speed-dial through a decade of musical styles), Thaemitz looks set to remain a key figure in the advancement of electronic composition.

"With all this talk of 'Ambient' music's subversion of melody for noise, we're supposed to be anti-spectacle, right? But I will confess that it was a rather cynical reaction to the sudden commercial viability of 'Ambient' music as a spectacle of the anti-spectacle in the early 90s which made me release under my own name rather than something more anonymous."

ROBIN RIMBAUD
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Zusaan Kali Fasteau

Ecstatic transformations

"All our organs, tissues, cells, molecules and atoms are constantly vibrating," says Zusaan Kali Fasteau. "as are all the inanimate things on this planet, and all the celestial bodies. That is why music can heal and uplift; whereas some kinds of sounds, such as machinery vibrating at seven cycles per second, can actually make you sick. Your sound universe shapes how you feel and how you experience life." Such holistic embraces of music's more mystical powers are often couched as pretentious, unless you happen to be dealing with the genuine article, in which case they resound with the weight of a lifetime spent worshipping sound. Always ahead on the hipster curve, multi-instrumentalist Fasteau has been exploring just about every avenue of enlightenment, musical and otherwise, the world over, for more than 25 years. On her recent solo disc *Sensual Hearing*, she leads a rotating ensemble through 16 startling "spontaneous compositions". Whether executing burning soprano sax solos, sonorous cello scrapes, multiphonic vocals, or playing one of her arsenal of guitars, Fasteau fulfills the promise of a pan-cultural, freely improvised "folk" music better than any other exponent of the late 60s/early 70s jazz avant garde.

Raised in New York and Paris by a musical family (including a cellist grandfather who threw musical parties for George and Ira Gershwin when he wasn't woodshedding daily in front of his granddaughter), Fasteau's formative obsession with music — she studied piano, cello, voice and flute — led her initially to the halls of academic. After receiving a BA in

anthropology and an MA in World Music, she reached the conclusion that her studies had been "largely irrelevant to the vibrant intensity of creativity". Forgoing the "secure" of professordom, Fasteau pledged to live a nomadic life utterly dedicated to the performance and creation of music.

Her first stop was the much mythologised NYC free jazz scene of the late 60s/early 70s, where she was exposed to all the trials of that community. Landing in San Francisco in 1971, Fasteau met Donald Rafael Garrett, whose vast contributions to avant-garde jazz and guru-like influence on its practitioners constitute a shamelessly unsung chapter in the music's history. Garrett co-founded The Experimental Band with Muhal Richard Abrams, and played on Coltrane's Om album and the corresponding West Coast tour. It wasn't long before he and Fasteau had solidified a bond — musically, personally and spiritually — which would carry them across countless cultures over several continents for the next six years. "We nourished each other's concepts of sound, playing music at least nine hours every day for six years," recalls Fasteau. "We played at home, while walking the streets, travelling to gigs, before the gig, after the gig, and of course during the gigs — nonstop music." The spacious acoustic shimmer of their duo performances, under the name Sea Ensemble, can be heard on *We Were Together*, recorded for ESP in the early 70s, and on recordings for the Italian Red label. Fasteau also hopes to release some archival Sea Ensemble recordings on her own Flying Note label.

As a woman in the boys' club of improvised music, Fasteau has mastered the searing energy language of her male free jazz peers, yet she also offers her own unique take, derived as much from her own femininity as from her immersion in the musics of other cultures. Indeed, she believes, "It is the responsibility of women musicians to create new music from their own centre of energy." Her soprano sax playing, alongside the likes of Daniel Carter, William Parker and Bobby Few on *Sensual Hearing*, and Few and Noah Howard on the recent CMPI title *Episode Kin*, is every bit as robust as her formidable compatriots. "Western culture is too yang," she complains. "The male aspects of behaviour have dominated, and women have been systematically excluded from making culture. In my music I balance yin and yang parameters of sound: the point is not to exclude yin or yang; they enhance each other. Contrast, in dynamics, pitch, tone, speed and so on, brings richness to the music and holds the interest of the audience."

Since her return to America in the mid-80s, Fasteau has deliberately opted for a DIY approach to her career, releasing six albums herself via Flying Note, where she is able to control all aspects of production. In fact, self-production seems to be something Fasteau has cultivated quite a passion for, especially the technical possibilities opened up by digital production technologies, something that many improvisors battantly shun as somehow "impure". "Music technology is approaching the pinnacle of perfection," she says,

label lore

No. 011

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(woodblock), Cubeloop and Circus Lab
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Description Sibling labels offering mostly
indescribable Japanese mutations of solarized
jazz atmospheres, fragmenting Hip hop,
breakbeat noir, and Improv

Brief history Soup founded in 1995, Shi-Ra-Nui
in 1996. Sub-label 360 Records — out jazz
division — founded in 1997, in 1997 also
started Silverstone, Street, Silver World. Other
label compiled works by Soup staff: DJ Vadim
Presents Broken Art Sculptured Sounds'
Japan edit. Also, Niji is guest producer of Zero
Gravity label

Statement of intent Soup presents street jazz
breaks, Shi-Ra-Nui presents broken shadow
jazz and altered beats; 360 Records presents
out jazz soundz; Silverstone series is jazz
documents series. The three labels have
original jazz attitude and improvise, support
each other

Other activities Events: Liberator is presented by
Soup, Zen and Nebahara at Shibusawa Jazz
breakbeats DJ meets jazz improvisor recording
every month

Future plans First albums by Cappablock,
Weedbeats, Computer Soup, Montage second
album, albums by Suzuki, Dubsonic, Starship
Arkestra, DJ Hat-Mony, Ruff-Nuts, Piano remix
album by DJ Vadim, Mi Kitta, etc. and more

Choice cut Various — *Soliloquy Of Chaos* (Shi-Ra-Nui), Various — *Silverstone* (Soup Disk)
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global ear

Budapest

On the landing of a grand marble staircase, beneath the neo-Gothic vaulting of the Hungarian Culture Foundation in Budapest's Castle District, Félix Lajkó is playing a concert. Improvising with him is the bear-like double bass player Ásza Lónoky, who rolls and wrestles with his instrument. The barefoot Félix Lajkó, by contrast, is pale and interesting in a very East European kind of way. His feet are bare; his back turned to the audience, but he exudes an other-worldly charisma as he plays the fiddle with all the drama the instrument can afford — both in the shapes he throws into and in the shifting, sliding, occasionally spine-tingling melodies he soars into.

Félix Lajkó is still only in his early 20s, but his music is the most interesting new noise to emerge in post-communist Hungary. It's a unique hybrid of classical influences (he is conservatory-trained), folk roots (he first showed up gazing on the Budapest folk scene in the early 1990s), and still works with folk instrumentation) and jazz (he played for a while with respected Hungarian free jazz saxophonist Dörsch, and his current style is as much improvisation as composition). Attracted to its rough cardboard packaging, I picked up his CD *Félix Lajkó És Zenekara*, noted the pictures of the weird-looking young violinist within, and took it home to discover a music so passionate as to verge on melodrama. It swoops between joy and melancholy, fusing classical figures and folk melodies with an occasionally ironic assurance reminiscent of interwar Central European cabaret.

Despite being anomalous in almost every respect, it's a music that could only have come from somewhere. 'Somewhere', though, is not a simple concept. The Hungarian Culture Foundation promotes work from the Magyar minorities stranded in neighbouring states. Félix Lajkó comes from Subotica — just over the border in Vojvodina, the Hungarian-speaking northern part of Serbia. The audience, huddled on the stairs above and below the landing, are mostly concerned middle class thirtysomethings, serious and conservative.

It suits the atmosphere perfectly when church bells begin ringing from the Matyás templom across

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the square. The musicians, who are working without amplification, slow down and fall silent. The gentle tolling becomes part of the piece. Then Félix Lajkó plays a few short phrases, jamming with the bells. Ásza Lónoky joins in, thumbing the odd bass note, and the music builds back up from there. It's a breathtaking moment, and for the second time in half an hour I find myself moved to the verge of tears.

Back in 1904, while the building Félix Lajkó is playing in was being constructed to serve as Finance Ministry, Béla Bartók and Zoltán Kodály were touring remote regions of what was then Greater Hungary, rooting out folk music from the vanishing rural heritage. Bartók went on to fuse its tonal qualities into his version of orchestral modernism, while Kodály created an all-embracing music education system based on the songs they had collected. As a result, Hungary is infused with an elemental sense of its national musical heritage. But by the 1970s, folk was being eroded by Communism and Western pop. Young urban musicians followed Bartók and Kodály out into the country, looking for a new link to rural traditions. Their search led to Transylvania, now part of Romania, where isolation from most of the 20th century had preserved the context of ancient music. The revival that ensued integrated folk into a totally dissident culture.



Félix Lajkó

Indeed, folk's lengthy isolation might well be the decisive factor that will help it survive the arrival of capitalism, where Hungary's other dissident cultures have failed. Its once ferile rock underground has lost the fire of dissidence, while more mainstream acts can't compete with Western imports. Besides, the market is tiny. Sooner or later, all Hungarian acts have to answer the tried old question facing anyone on the periphery of the multi-national mainstream: Act locally and try to sell globally? Or act globally and almost certainly never sell anything but locally? A Hungarian imitation of The Spice Girls, for example (there are in fact two such), is never going to interest anyone abroad. Nevertheless, the Hungarian Spice Girls are more likely to make the local charts than any cobbalt violinist from Vojvodina.

Of all the groups struggling to make an impact in formerly communist Europe, only Labach have managed to attract much attention outside of their immediate context. Félix Lajkó, growing up in a very different part of ex-Yugoslavia, shares a little of their background. It's typical that the one artist who looks likely to create something both defiantly Hungarian and capable of transcending Hungarian-ness, comes not only from a region where folk traditions still help define identity, but also from a Yugoslav art school tradition that has always embraced the avant garde in ways its Magyar counterpart rarely dared.

Meanwhile, Budapest employees of multinational music companies speak in awe of Félix.

Lajkó the ferocity of his talent is apparent to all who come across it. But Lajkó, by all accounts something of an eccentric, who still occasionally cycles across the border to gigs, is clearly uninterested in any kind of conventional recording career. His latest CD is his third. The other two are unavailable. The new one was expected for about a year before it finally came out.

Hegy gigs often in Budapest, improvising with shifting line-ups that include double bass, zither, cimbalom and drums. Apart from this concert on the staircase, I've also seen him play at the Hungarian Jazz Festival, accompanied by someone beating a milk churn. Imitated by recurring feedback, he played rapidly and with obvious anger, disappearing huffily offstage after a curt half hour.

But at the Hungarian Culture Foundation he plays so softly it draws the audience in towards him. A final solo piece builds gently around a classical figure, veering off into weird emotional extremes. Towards the end he begins whistling, a melody that wouldn't be out of place on a Spaghetti Western soundtrack. There in the staircase the music hangs in the air, poised somewhere between the wistful nonchalance of routine and the passion of peak experience. **DAVE RIPPER** Félix Lajkó És Zenekara is released by Muzak (Refuge 00 36 62 312 303). Thanks to Bob Cohen for assistance with this article.

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local hero



A very English voice combines with wholly un-English sentiments in the idiosyncratic songs of **Robert Wyatt**, who is about to break a six-year silence with a brilliant new album.
Words: Biba Kopf. Photography: Michele Tumani

"**T**he last record I made under my own name was while there was no elected prime minister," reminisces Robert Wyatt with a slight shudder as he recalls the grey years ("John Major was there by default, as it were, so I quickly made a record"). When he actually got voted in, I was so depressed by the thought that another generation of English people were prepared to vote for a Conservative government that I went on strike for five years, and now he's gone I have made another record."

Pausing long enough for the listener to weigh up the implications of his one man art strike, Wyatt leans forward, his face creasing into regularly exercised laughter lines, as he readies himself to toss a banana skin under the oncoming train of thought.

"At least that's what I would like to say, but that's a load of old bollocks!" he guffaws. "I just had a hard time collecting my thoughts throughout the 90s. They seemed to just dissipate."

"But I have to earn a living," Wyatt continues, "so I just collected together scraps of tunes and words, with a lot of help from other people, other people's tunes, Athie's words, and I found to my surprise that I had enough material for a record."

Fully animated, nothing can stop Robert Wyatt now. He is sitting in the garden of the ramshackle summer dacha he and his wife Athie (née Alfreda) bought on the mouth of the Humber river near Cleethorpes, along with a house in Louth, Lincolnshire, with the proceeds from selling their Twickenham flat in the late 1980s. They might be far removed from the heart of things, but their thirst for a righteous fight hasn't diminished. On the way from the train station, Athie, herself an artist and poet, rejoices in their recent victory over the developers by getting the land around their dacha — one of a colony that used to serve as a holiday retreat for Yorkshire miners — declared a conservation area.

If sunshine and a seaside victory were not enough, Robert Wyatt's excellent new album *Sleep* is just cause for celebration. Recorded at former Roxy Music guitarist Phil Manzanera's studio, it marks Wyatt's return to working with a range of different musicians, rather than trying to do everything himself on that. Athie calls his 50 quid keyboard. You can imagine what a difference a line-up including Brian Eno, Evan Parker, Anne Whitehead, Belgian guitarist Philip Catherine, and, most surprisingly, Paul Weller made, not only to the texture of the music, but also to Wyatt's spirit.

"The people who came in, they really livened me up," enthuses Wyatt, "because when you are on your own, I mean, not in a group, you can get a bit... abstract. You can lose your grip on that physical, visceral thing of making music; that momentum of working with other people. So it wasn't just their contributions that were valuable, it was the psychological effect, for me, of being back among other people."

What with its balance of musical invention and playfulness, song structure and the freedom for players like Parker to extend song form way beyond its usual parameters, and the sharp observation and Lear-like nonsense of its lyrics, *Sleep* reverses the spiral of despair which Wyatt's latter records seemed locked into. Indeed, at its most buoyantly optimistic it is as exuberant as "Love Makes Sweet Music", the very first single he made with Soft Machine some 30 years ago, especially when Wyatt's voice looks into — in his words — his "giggle chorus act" with Brian Eno (on "Heaps Of Sheep"). That same spirit comes through into the affectionate comedy of "The Duchess", featuring Parker's soprano and Eno's

synthesizer. Thereafter, it takes a wistful tumble through a Wyatt/Catherine ballad and a vaguely troubled dream song co-written with former Soft Machine colleague Hugh Hopper. And then Wyatt slays you with the album's masterpiece, a faintly comic, yet heartbreakingly melancholy philosophical meditation called "Free Will And Testament". Over Paul Weller's guitar and slide revamp of the tune (originally written by Mark Kramer), Wyatt opens brilliantly with the lines, "Given free will but



within certain limitations? I cannot will myself to limitless mutations", and concludes with the devastating plea, "Had I been free, I could have chosen not to be me/Demented forces push me madly round to treadmill... Let me off please, I am so very tired."

The piece heads a canon of great Wyatt songs, among them Soft Machine's "Moon In June", Matching Mole's "Oh Caroline", "Signed Captain" and "The God Song", the exile's lament of "Dondesbar" and the whole of the Rock Bottom album. His voice threads such songs through successive tapestries of psychedelic, experimental, Rock In Opposition, post-punk, artrock, jazz, fringe and Electronica musics without ever tugging him away from the path he marked out for himself 30 years ago.

"Any consistency comes from the fact that my brain goes round and round similar preoccupations for years on end," Wyatt remarks in his characteristically self-deprecating manner. "I rag away at one or two thoughts like Winnie The Pooh, who was, in fact, my earliest role model. That's where any consistency comes from."

Robert Wyatt talks as he sings, just as you would expect of the man who, 30 years ago and then some, introduced the once revolutionary notion of singing it like you talk it, while all around him were mimicking American R&B vocalists. In Soft Machine he drummed and sang the "pathophysiological alphabet in the sour-sweet pop counterculture of a defrocked Canterbury choirboy. Well, who's to know whether he ever really sat in a cathedral pew but as a prime mover of the Canterbury scene out of which emerged the pre-Softs group Wilde Flowers, Caravan and Kevin Ayers, Wyatt helped set the tone of a very English kind of psychedelia. And just as his voice — high keening, sometimes deliberately flattened at the edges to vaguely comic effect or to up the melancholy quotient — refused to disguise its origins, it also expressed a range of emotions and concerns that must be the envy of classically trained counter tenors who are invariably confined to freakish roles. After rigor mortis set in at Soft Machine, around the time when the thrilling, fuzzed rutting of their lead players started hardening into a bookish cousin to jazz rock, Wyatt was frozen out of the group he founded. All these years later his "expulsion" still pains him.

"Well, I think it was Tom Waits who said, I slept through the 60s," ponders Wyatt. "All I can say is, I certainly didn't do that but I envy him a great deal. I mean, for me, the things that came out of it were quite other. My son was born in 1966 so it wasn't a waste of time. Something came out of it, but I find it hard to imagine that I wouldn't have been happier somewhere else with someone else, as far as the music went."

Running on the French for Soft Machine he teased his ex-colleagues by naming his next group Matching Mole. With them he produced two albums — the first an erratic masterpiece of pioneering mellotron mood experiments wrapped around a pair of heartbreak songs, "O Caroline" and "Signed Captain", and its sequel, Little Red Record, an occasionally brilliant mélange of slabs, bizarre song and racing fusion pieces. He was about to record a third when, in June, 1973, he fell out of a fourth floor window at a party and broke his back. The accident rendered him paraplegic. But straightforward during his stay in hospital he began formulating Rock Bottom, the album that launched his career proper.

"I don't think I have ever been a group musician really," Wyatt postulates. "Now this sounds sarcastic, but I was liberated by paraplegia from having to be in a group. It was only really since being in a wheelchair that I have had to do what I feel most comfortable doing, which is doing what I do best, then finding the people most appropriate to the particular tracks. I mean, there was no way I could go on the road

with a group featuring Paul Weller and Evan Parker and Anne Whitehead. I don't have to think like that anymore. There isn't that awful anxiety of having to fit every person to every tune and every tune to every person, because that is your group."

As evidenced by such a statement, humour and pain are never far apart in Wyatt's work. His music is so profoundly affecting because it's very much a direct expression of his feelings at the moment of recording. That's not to say he's the fringe's equivalent of a '70s singer-songwriter opening their veins to a community of damaged souls. On the contrary, the power of Wyatt's art resides in its understatement. So the post-accident Rock Bottom registers the shock, the enormity of the life change, the strange, weightless feeling of hospitalisation in submerged, slithering electronic melodies merging with a fuzz of horns over surging currents of percussion. As a drummer the accident forced him to seek more imaginative ways of keeping the music moving than by simply frog-marching it to a hefty bass-drum lock

— thereby bringing it in line with most all late 20th century popular music. Besides, rockbeat has always been anathema to Wyatt's freer musical thinking — a statement borne out by the first-time issue of the British free music outfit The Amazing Band's solitary recording, *Rock*, on which Wyatt drummed. "I can safely say with not pride, but with defiance, that I have never in the end made a rock record in my life," Wyatt proclaims. "If you lean on my rhythm tracks you will always sort of get tripped up somewhere. I just love the ducking and diving of the jazz rhythm section too much. Mind you, I haven't checked back to see..."

If Rock Bottom was Wyatt's first landmark solo recording, the personal breakthrough happened earlier, on *End Of An Ear*, his first solo album proper, an intriguing experimental drum 'n' voice record produced in 1970 while he was still in Soft Machine. If he left Soft Machine's hatchet-faced response to their earlier slithering psychedelic orientation was forcing him out of his own group, he wasn't looking to cram *End Of An Ear* with stiltborn Soft Machine songs. On the contrary, the record came across like Wyatt was out to prove he could easily outflank their avant garde manoeuvres. Pitched somewhere

between Oskar Sala's soundtrack for Hitchcock's *The Birds* and Meredith Monk's vocal compositions, it scatters swirls of multitracked vocals over slippery drum and piano-led rhythm figures.

"I learned a lot doing that record," recalls Wyatt. "It was the first time I had ever really gone into the studio and just treated the tape as a canvas upon which to paint. If anything, I have always felt more kinship with painters, like Chagall or Picasso, for example, rather than musicians and composers. That is very dangerous, and a lot of people have made the mistake of thinking that they can translate the visual arts into music. You have to test it musically, because if you only test it visually, you can come a bit of a cropper. Even so, in my head I still see music

almost as much as hear it, so just that feeling of treating the tape like a canvas was incredibly exciting and very euphoric, and it also broke my fear and intimidation of keyboard players. There is a sense of discovery which is often the most enjoyable thing in art for me, rather than just the business of manufacturing perfectly constructed objects."

The experience proved invaluable when the time came to record Rock Bottom. Even before the accident he found the notion of recording as a simulation of real-time live performance problematic. "As soon as I started singing the drummer would stop playing," quips Wyatt with mock bemusement. "It used to happen all the time. Never could work out why." On Rock Bottom, multitracking resolved that problem



"I can safely say with, not pride, but with defiance, that I have never made a rock record in my life"

From early Soft Machine through Slapp Happy and on to Steve Beresford's various projects, humour has always been a strong feature of the British avant garde. Often as not it grates horribly, because it comes on like a typically British apology for getting serious. But in Wyatt's case, humour is integral to his being and therefore to his work: it emerges from somewhere deep inside the music, adds a wholly other dimension to it. Besides, who can resist opening Wyatt lines as drollyingly daft yet spot-on, theologically speaking, as "What on earth are you doing, God?" from Matching Mole's "God Song"?

"I mean, I am a muddle-up, like lots of people," says Wyatt, getting serious for a moment. "I know I joke that deep down I am shallow, and I think that is right in fact, one of the funniest things about recording Sleep was that though some of the songs had been written in the depths of despair, to coin a cliché, when I was recording them I never felt happier. So I felt a bit of a fraud by the time I had finished doing it, and in fact it is the most nursery rhyme-y things that most accurately reflect my feeling at the time I was recording."

"What I don't like about Anglophone culture is the relentless pressure to be anti-serious," he continues. "The idea that seriousness is suspect, that if anybody is serious, well, they haven't got laid recently, you know, lightened up, man, and all that stuff... My dad used to say there is nothing more ponderously sunny than light music. And there is nothing that can make you more miserable than a series of bright major chords and so on, and that, quite apart from anything else, the desperate attempt to be liked has a very leading effect."

"Well," Wyatt says, "it's not that I believe in seriousness or believe in silliness. I just think you have to be scared to be true to how you feel, because there is a constant pressure to be cowardly in what you do, which knows no boundaries."

In terms of Wyatt's music, humour is his way of bringing to the bulk of the song the same fluidity and swing of his rhythm tracks. His shifting balance of weight and nonsense recalls the French surrealists' love affair with jazz, embodied in the writings of Jacques Prévert and Boris Vian. Wyatt's courageous commitment to silliness when applicable in defiance of the more po-faced avant garde ordinances, is shared by one of Sleep's unlikeable guest musicians, Evan Parker. Other than Sleep, Parker's extremely rare song sessions pretty much amount to his appearances with Scott Walker and Vic Reeves.

"I think Evan was Steve Beresford's idea," Wyatt smiles, Beresford being Reeves's musical arranger. "Vic hadn't been told how venerable a character Evan Parker was, and in the middle of one of his long solos, he shouted out, 'Shut it, Parker!' and Evan really broke up."

Wyatt knew Parker well enough to feel comfortable asking him to record on Sleep. "I mean, if you are lucky enough to know Evan Parker, and think you can embarrass him into playing on your record, you do, don't you? Can you think of a better saxophone player? I can't." But he did have misgivings about what Parker's sterner followers might feel about him playing on the wonderful nonsense track "The Duchess".

"I know that Evan, like a lot of musicians, is a fairly open-minded listener," explains Wyatt. "I mean, it was Evan who stocked me up on the gabs in my Dionne Warwick collection, for example. But people who follow Evan's music follow the philosophy of what he is doing very closely, because it is a very important part of the appreciation of it, and him playing along with me scraping away on Althee's old Polish fiddle I don't think figures in any of these schemes. So I was a bit worried that they would think I had somehow blackmailed him into doing something, which wasn't

quite the point. I wasn't worried about Evan himself, all he asks is that you are trying to do something and you're not following a formula."

Though Wyatt commands respect from so many corners, he himself is modest to a fault about his own pulling power. But in terms of the music he makes and who he chooses to make it with, it is not so much defiance as a balance of his own tastes and desires with his ability to get along with the people he asks in to help realise them. "This may be apocryphal, this story," begins Wyatt, by way of illustrating the point, "but I think I heard it from Evan, so I don't think it's too like gossip. It's about Derek Bailey, whom I admire very much. I think it was that bass guitarist, Jaco Pastorius, he said to Derek, 'Oh, that was a nice little bit of playing there!', to which Derek said, 'Aw, that chord's been dealt with!'

"Well," he laughs, "I wouldn't really have the confidence to know which chords have and have not been dealt with. I had conversations like that with Mike Mantler [Wyatt has sung on a number of Mantler recordings, among them *The Happy Child*.] He'd say, 'How can people go on using the common chord of a major arpeggio?', and I just blushed deeply, because I think that there is at least two and a half hours of my recordings that are just sustained major arpeggios. I love major chords, I could just go on and on, play C-E-G on an organ and just hold it. I do like the basic alphabet of the common musical language, as much as I like what has been done with it, which is why I have never abandoned it to just become an explorer of new music. So there are a lot of people I would never ask to play on my records, because I know that they would feel uncomfortable with chords that have been dealt with!"



It's difficult to think of any other musician who has touched so many bases that are so far apart as Robert Wyatt. Normally you'd need special dispensation from the Pope or some other such higher authority to negotiate the difficult passage from The Monkees — Wyatt had a chart hit in the early 70s with a cover of "I'm A Believer" — to Ultrammarine, via Michael Mantler. Even allowing for the diplomatic immunity that protects Wyatt from the usual inane accusations fired at anybody who moves so freely between genres, the mention of Paul Weller's presence on Sleep produces the biggest shock among Wyatt's more lethargic admirers. For his part, Wyatt is a longtime fan of both Weller's cussedness and his music, explaining that he got to meet one of his "handful of rock heroes" when Weller was demoing at Phil Manzanera's studio.

"In the mid-80s I was writing what sounded like mournful love songs. In fact they were vehicles to express my deep hatred of David Owen"

"I left him a note saying if you need that kind of old man sound on any old hum vocals, a bit of the old gravitas, I am available," Wyatt explains, "and I got a quite a witty note back saying, no, I don't really think I need that, but if you need a bit of strumming on anything, I'll come along and have a go. He was extremely courteous and helpful, and he wasn't going to presume to put the Weller stamp on anything."

"The thing is," he goes on, "people think I want to write Robert Wyatt records. You know, here we go, Jimmy Somerville on valium. When he came in, I was a bit nervous, because I normally work with people I know, and it was also a bit nervous on his behalf, because he might feel that some of the things that I do are a bit on the whimsical side."

As it happens, Weller contributes to two of Sleep's most stunning pieces — the aforementioned "Free Will And Testament" and "Blues In Bob Minor". The latter is a lengthy, linguistic tour de force modelled on Bob Dylan's tongue twisting



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"Subterranean Homesick Blues", except it's almost three times as long. Lyrically, it's an extremely witty, phantasmagorical dousing down of the foulness of British politics — though, in keeping with the best post-surrealist traditions, anyone would be hard put to pin down the real point of the song.

Incidentally, it's also Wyatt's first blues. "A bit po-faced, I always thought that as long as apartheid actually existed I didn't really have a right to play the blues, but now Mandela has sorted that one out I thought I would have a go at this old blues business. Never too late to learn. I always thought the blues was an unbeatable chord sequence. I just think it is quite extraordinary how it is endlessly regenerable. And I had the lyrics, which went a bit like that Cap'n ad, 'you know, 'Papa?' 'Nicol?' Well, mine went, 'Ah, Ah, oh, Ah, ah, Ah.' But when Alie heard it, she said, you can't sing that, and I said I can, look, it's dead minimalist, it's really far out, and she said, no, you're being fucking lay, write some words, people want something to listen to. So I said, OK, you want some fucking words, I'll give you some fucking words. So I just wrote a stream of words I thought that like tumbling, relentless rhythm [on "Subterranean Homesick Blues"] and I also like [Longleow's poem] "Hawhawa", and the whole thing comes out of that. The reason I referred to myself in the title as Bob Mine is because to be any kind of Bob in that context is an honour, sir."

The six year silence that preceded Shleep was not the first to so punctuate Robert Wyatt's recording career. His first period in the wilderness occurred in the mid-70s after his two albums for Virgin, Rock Bottom and its sequel, *Ruth Is Stronger Than Richard*, which featured his outstanding version of Charlie Haden's Liberation Music Orchestra anthem "Song For Che". Through an invitation from Rough Trade's Geoff Travis, Wyatt began his second great set of recordings — the series of singles now collected together on *Nothing Can Stop Us* (set for reissue by Hannibal early next year). They include a superlative reinterpretation of Chic's "At Last I'm Free", a heartbreaking reading of Billie Holiday's "Strange Fruit", and a reclamation of the Cuban folk song "Guantanamera" from its Radio 2 void. In their original single form, they were intended to be music, quickfire bulletins broadcast from Wyatt central to the increasingly ragged broad left alliance.

"Because I don't do gigs, everything I do has to be on record," says Wyatt. "It has this sort of portentous hanging over it, this dreadful weight. By doing them as singles, I wanted them to be almost like journalism, do them fast and then they should disappear. Old records are like old tattoos, you know, 'I love Martha true' and, like, oh no, I've been going out with Carol for two weeks, how can I get this fucking tattoo off? It wasn't my idea to compile them as an album, it was Geoff Travis's, so if it does hang together as a record, he can take credit for that."

The singles began a new phase of Wyatt songs and music. He composed the soundtrack for *The Animals Film*, a harrowing documentary examining the abuses of factory farming. More and more the melancholy and the wristiness of Wyatt's music was being combined with a tough lyrical stance. The news that Robert Wyatt had joined the Communist Party hardly came as a surprise.

"I do like a kind of integrity of the song, that the words are true to the way that it is done, the tune that is true to the lyrics and all that kind of thing," he explains. "I do like that sort of consistency, although I play perverse games with it, but that is me being deeply shallow for you! In the mid-80s I was writing what sounded like mournful love songs whereas in actual fact they were vehicles to express my deep hatred of David Owen. Some people consider this a decent exercise, typical party hack behaviour,

undercover work, but I don't think I have done that on this new record. I think there is a consistency between the tunes and the words, they come from the same source."

"But my lyrics, as far as I am concerned, have always been fairly unpolished, they always end up as being what happened when I started writing. I have never made a deliberate attempt to either be political or not be political. In any case, politically I am a reactionary — if there is too much of one thing going on I try and tip the balance the other way. If there is a lot of acid I need a lot of alkali, and so on. The fact that a lot of the songs ended up with political references is simply a reflection of the preoccupations and pressures which came out or were exorcised when I started to write them. Besides, I never in my own mind distinguish between the use of an utterly private image and a very public one. To me they are all in a way utterly private and then, as with all music, you just have to hope that they resonate somewhere beyond. To those people who say that image or phrase is contentious, I can only say, well, I don't have to fall in love with the same girl as Stevie Wonder when he is singing 'You Are The Sunshine Of My Life' to actually enjoy the song."

As the 80s wore on, with the Conservative government systematically dismantling all the social gains of the post-war period, Wyatt became more and more worn down. His music, not unnaturally, reflected his spiritual downward spiral:

"I felt there were assumptions being made on my behalf, which if they included me, I would feel very invaded and interfered with, like after a prime minister described to foreigners the British way of life, I would like to write to every foreigner I knew to say, she doesn't mean me, she is not speaking on my behalf, and so, via songs, I can do that, I can exercise that viscosity of being stuck to things which made my skin crawl, wash them off via a song."

"I really was depressed to a point of serious disorientation by the Conservative revolt not on principle, but because it was like ... Having been born in 1945 I was constructed psychologically simultaneously with what they call the welfare state. My parents thought at last, after the chaos and misery of the past, the basis of a kind of human civilisation was being built in our time, nothing grand, you

know, just the basic framework that makes civilised life possible, and the idea that that was being pulled from under our feet just made me very, very queasy."

"Depression," Wyatt asserts, "was a biological response to conditioning ... It was just too gassy, it was nightmarish, there was something hellish going on, and it entered my dreamworld. I mean, I do live in a dreamworld and I never haven't done. I wake up just long enough in the daytime to eat lots of food and then try to go back to sleep. I mean, I am not by nature rebellious or activist or anything like that, I am really self-indulgent, but this business was stopping me enjoying myself, it totally invaded and disrupted my world and I had to exercise it as best I could. And I desperately looked around for sympathisers."

"People say, you only preach to the converted. Well, that's good enough for me. The reassurance of like-minded souls keeps me going."

The funny thing is, the deeper Robert Wyatt trawls the depths of his memory of a painfully difficult decade that left him as depressed as the Left was demoralised, the faster and funnier flows his analysis of the Right's political impact on a very human condition.

"I mean, I hope I am wrong, I don't wanna be right," he concludes. "What pessimist wants to be right? I am not a fucking pervert! Jesus Christ, if anyone wants to persuade me that I am wrong, please do. Take this weight off my mind, set me free. Blondies just wanna have fun" □ Shleep is released by Hannibal (through Rykodisc/Mvd) on 29 September. The Amazing Band's Roar is available now on FMR (through Hormone Mundi). The bulk of Robert Wyatt's back catalogue is due to be reissued by Hannibal early next year.



Under cover of their quickfire wit, Salford sampling duo **Stock, Hausen & Walkman** take potshots at music, low pop or cheesy listening. They are also extremely sharp improvisors. Words: Clive Bell.

irony in the soul



at anything that moves, be it high art
Photography: Rowan Seddon-Harvey



“D

on't worry, I'm not going to get drunk.” Andrew Sharpley, the taller half of Stock, Hausen & Walkman, strides soberly across the pub with what feels to me like his second pint in five minutes. “We did an interview by fax with a German magazine, and the first question was, ‘Is your music ironic?’ So I answered, ‘No.’ And the interview said, ‘Their music is not ironic.’”

Just the name Stock, Hausen & Walkman indicates you're going to get humour and technology. “Those traditional Japanese instruments, the sampler and the CD player”, as Sharpley puts it. In a recent article in the classical music magazine Gramophone, Philip Taghey lined up the Salford/London duo of Sharpley and Matt Wand alongside Negativland, Billy Jenkins, composer John White, Yoshitomo Ono and Yamatsuka Eye as prime contemporary examples of musicians with a finely tuned sense of the ridiculous. But none of these people is simply, or primarily, aiming to be funny. The humour is often a side effect of a subversive creativity, a serious musical agenda that sees no reason to exclude the downright stupid. In the best of their work there are many things gone on at once, and the listener's response is complex.

The most recent Stock, Hausen & Walkman release that I have is a 7" single on transparent vinyl called “Buy Me/Sue Me”. All Tracks By Me!, reads the label copy. Simply playing this record challenges your whole relationship with your record deck: all 42 tracks are locked grooves.

Each one is a sample of someone singing the word “me”, and each one goes round in a loop till you nudge the record arm. It's hilarious, it's irritating, it's a high concept limited edition art object, it's a confident and original piece of music seamlessly welded to a comment on the medium itself, and I don't think Gramophone will be reviewing it.



Andrew Sharpley (l) and Matt Wand





SHAW have performed and released records for about eight years, and have been spared media hysteria, or indeed much media attention at all. "We met a bloke in Salford who thought we were Japanese," says Andrew Sharpley. "He'd somehow read about us in a Japanese magazine as influencing Japanese bands. Then he discovered he was living 800 yards away from us."

Sharpley has now relocated to London, but Matt Wand remains in Salford, near Manchester. When they started out they were a quartet, producing music which mucked about at the crossroads of plunderphonics, samplephilia, free improvisation and DIY electronics. Wand: "In fact the first gig under the name Stock, Hausen & Walkman was just [saxophonist] Rex Caswell and myself in a wine bar in Stoke-on-Trent. That was a different kind of music, but strangely it was more the kind of thing we're now. But the first one with the four piece line-up was at the Town Hall Centre in East London [in the late 80s]. That was the first time [cellist] Dan Weaver had ever played with us. We invited him along because he had a legal-looking instrument — the cello looked like it was kosher. Sharpley was playing violin then. I had the tape controller on the floor, and percussion and springs, and the steel drum with a contact mic."

This first performance was an exhilarating and highly original racket, with John Zorn-type randy-free shits of distortion. The electronics were used differently from other improvisors — unlike the ambience or exploratory feel of Paul Lytle or AIM, this was a splatter from loud and barely controlled equipment, and already the plunderphonics element of including other people's recordings was present. The group were quickly recognized as a quirky improv act, and were given the Devil's Bazaar seal of approval with an invitation to play at the 1990 Company Week. I have a recording of this set on which I can hear drum machines doing battle with frenzied clarinet riffs, splices off a CD and voices from a TV, but not that of Dan Weaver's cello. "Dan's input was nothing to do with his live playing," says Wand. "He was the master of the sequencer. He was the one who knew about Cubase and samplers — he used to teach it — whereas we knew fuck all. I didn't have an Atari computer to work with till about two years ago. Dan was generating material on sequencers for use with dancers, some of which they couldn't cope with before now. So some of the material came from that."

In the past few years, Dan Weaver has mainly played live with dance and theatre groups while living in Germany, and Rex Caswell has quit the group, and the

albums, hit the crest of the Easy Listening boom of 1996, and has so far sold around 15,000 copies. This success, although coming five years too late as far as SHAW are concerned, means that the label at last has enough money to release a flurry of current projects. This will include a Hot Air sampler, with tracks from all past and planned releases, a second CD by Dummy Run / Sharpley with Nick Birmingham, a follow-up to this year's Little Pink Rocket CD, an Organ Transplants Volume 2, and a new Stock, Hausen & Walkman vinyl LP probably entitled Oh My Bag (after a Japanese supermarket poster addressed to shoppers who have forgotten to recycle their carrier bags).

During our afternoon together, Sharpley and Wand play me about an hour's worth of sketches for Oh My Bag. Later Sharpley apologizes profusely for doing this, worrying that he has sabotaged the interview and distracted me from asking the really challenging questions. I immediately feel guilty; all I've really asked them is how come you make this great music? What might these challenging questions be? Sharpley: "In Manchester an American interviewer once asked us, 'When are you guys gonna lay yourselves on the line?' A question which Sharpley clearly considers absurd and unanswerable.

In fact, playing these sketches illuminates the duo's working methods: each brings a partly completed work for the other to interfere with. Wand is fairly depressed about things: "It's been like walking through mud," he says, and "This is one of those pieces that's only two and a half minutes long, but seems one and a half minutes longer than it should be." Sharpley is perky and optimistic, and keeps pointing out how far they've already got with the album. They seem to complement each other well, often by subverting each other's expectations, as you might imagine from the music itself. At one point, Wand tells his colleague: "This piece is probably completely irrelevant, but I'll play it because I know you always listen to irrelevant things and go, 'Oh yes, that's all right.'" Whereupon Sharpley pays no attention to the track in question.

"Sometimes there are pieces that you get so irritated with at an early stage that you have to throw it open," says Wand. "All of the gems of things are started individually and then they're interfered with. You do something and you go, oh that's rubbish, but the other person will like it because they don't know where it's come from, but they can see where it might go to." Was this process different when the group was a quartet? "Then, a lot of things were finished individually and collaged together afterwards. Some of the Blast First pieces [for the label's Deconstruct compilation, on which sampling musicians were invited to rip into the Blast First catalogue] were done



Manchester scene, to live in Salford. London. All these things and goings have left Sharpley and Wand as the two "who were stubborn enough", in Sharpley's words, to keep the SHAW flag flying. Much of their time is devoted to their Hot Air label releases up until this year have been few, but each one highly distinctive in look and (literally) feel — if no the cassette in a single-portion Rice Krispies packet to the hand-stitched leather glove of *Horizontals*; from the Variation Disc CD-ROM to the porno-collage playing cards included with last year's *Organ Transplants*.

This last record, almost entirely cobbled from Easy Listening electric organ



individually and then literally just cut together."

Their hands-on, DIY approach extends to the use of older equipment: they confess to being torn between wanting to kit themselves out with state-of-the-art machinery and not wanting to over-egg their music with the latest sampling and FX gizmos. "It's time to buy some new machinery that we don't know how to manipulate," says Wand, while Sharpley adds: "It's really easy to hear that drill outside and quickly record it." Do they feel their older recordings have a naive, 'amateur' feel that they're losing with experience? "I still think the same about things I did yesterday," says Sharpley. Wand comments: "The problem is that if you

know how to do something, then you have to push it, then just doing it isn't necessarily enough any more, you have to go one step further for yourself. All you need is a medium you can save things onto that's reliable, and a sampler with your 16 tracks — it's been that way for a good few years now. You get to know the cycle, familiarity breeds a kind of contempt."

How about the element of satire in the music? "That's gone," says Wand. "OK, to put it another way, when you started out were you reacting against what was happening in improvised music at the time?" Sharpley. "I think we were trying to come up with our own alternative, due to dissatisfaction with the model as put before us." Wand. "But we hadn't seen that many successful improvising gigs, so we were reacting against the fringe detritus end of improvising. We did see a very good gig down in Clapham, Phil Minton with John Butcher, and Tim Hodgkinson with Ken Hyde."

So you were happy to position yourselves as an improving group? Sharpley. "It wasn't that stage-managed, we were just interested in it and we did it. Improvised music is one of the few forms of music in England where the end result can be quite throwaway. Someone like Derek Bailey, who goes out and does gigs night after night, he's not bothered particularly about producing the masterpiece night after night. Sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't. I think both of us found that really attractive, rather than having to produce formed, finished things and present them to a public in a dry way. But then you have to deal with the problem of playing, which neither of us could really, so we bypassed it by using samples."

Both musicians insist that Stock, Hausen & Walkman are far from unique in their use of technology and satire. Wand. "Phil Minton is comedy itself, isn't he?" Sharpley. "That was the fantastic thing about seeing those gigs, that I thought Phil Minton was really funny, while the audience were sitting around in fur coats, drinking wine and going mm, mm, while I was passing myself. I was responding to him very directly. Of course, once you've heard a lot of them, you realise that what he does is very serious. Then you begin to listen to the intricacies of it and it takes off some of the initial impact."

Matt Wand recreates some of the scary impact of Phil Minton in close-up, he recalls Minton leaning across the table in an Italian restaurant, gabbling a demented rant about the Queen's garden party in imitation of a sphylocopic psychiatric patient, while Wand tried to eat his dinner. "He was a psychiatric nurse for a while, and he had stored up all the patients' behaviour. And because it wasn't a gig situation it was all the more disturbing."

In the case of the *Organ Transplants* album, was that intended as a satirical take on the current fascination with cheesy light music from the 1980s? Sharpley. "When I was running a record shop, all the electronic music I was hearing was really tame. There was lots of Ambient soup. People said it was the next big thing, but it seemed incredibly conservative. So I thought, what's the most insanely conservative record in the world? Let's try to make a cross between that and the experimental. It's like dressing in a really straight way, being ultra-conservative on the surface, and trying to slip a few things underneath, that carry question marks with them." Wand. "It becomes snare after the fact, in a way. You could see the Easy Listening boom coming, and that did give us the impetus to get on with it." Sharpley. "But everything we've ever done has been to do with noticing what's going on around us, and trying to absorb it. Whereas other people try to cut themselves off totally. I think it's because we're both fucking art students." Wand. "I never went to no bleedin' art school!" Sharpley. "In art school they say, look out the window, what's going on around you? Look at the world you live in." Wand. "But I was always against that in art school. They always said, do a still life, get some fruit and draw it." Sharpley. "*Organ Transplants* is a still life." Wand. "I agree with that. It's totally static. But making that record was a joyous process,



because you were sampling from things that were so inherently stupid and happy. I know when it's working because it makes me happy."

Earlier this year Stock, Hausen & Walkman took their show to Japan for half a dozen concerts with Dave Formula, former keyboard player with Magazine. Twice they teamed up with the like-minded Yoshihide Otomo, virtuoso abuser of turntable and Rhodes. They recall an especially memorable solo by Otomo in Osaka, where he plugged his mixer into itself and played the resultant feedback.

Other recent international SH&W activity includes the Venetian Deer CD-ROM, a collaboration with the German visual team Da! Veteranen. The ROM element allows you, among other things, to record your own lyrics to SH&W's music. There are 12 musical pieces, starting with the excellent "Sleep". A Death Metal sample from Slayer leads into a catchy xylophone riff — a sort of Death Lounge music.

Perhaps surprisingly, the word that comes to mind on hearing recent SH&W music is groovy. Maybe I should say groove-based. It's a kind of subverted Hip-Hop, sometimes employing old funk horn riffs and gritty drum loops. More spacious and self-confident than before, it resists the temptation to interrupt itself and swerve off-road into the bushes. There are tracks on the 1995 *Horbals CD* that pave the way for the approach, particularly "Brake Failure" and "Sniffed Up". You could almost be listening to recent instrumental groove tracks by The Beastie Boys.

If only I should mention them, because The Beastie Boys have this year become very interested in Stock, Hausen & Walkman. The first contact has resulted in a SH&W remix of Japanese group Buffalo Daughter for Grand Royal (The Beasties' label). Another new SH&W remix is found on Yoshihide Otomo's *Ground Zero* release, *Configuration Project: Consummate Vol 2*.

Matt Wand has also been spotted DJing at Cyberia, an Internet bar in Manchester. "It's very disturbing. The DJ box is in the window, so you feel like a showroom dummy. And you're DJing to people sat at computer screens. I find it quite alienating." Sharpley. "When we first started I remember saying to Rex, we should do one set where we just play other people's records. He said that's an insane idea, you keep your bloody any ideas to yourself! We're here to do music, and that would really piss the audience off. And now it's completely accepted."

So if you guys are so smart, why don't you make a hit record? Do something like *Sneaker Pimps*, get some dirty old loops, put a singer over it... Instead of replying, Sharpley passes me a large black lump of solid tredie. What's this? "It's unpressed vinyl. You might get three singles out of that."

Hi or no hi, the next few months should see the balloon go up, if you will, for the Hot Air label. In addition to everything mentioned above, there's a release by Canadian vinyl-manipulator Martin Tétreault (involving exclusively recordings by an organ and banjos group), a 10" for the Icelandic Fire label called "Empty Box", and a Swiss single featuring tracks called "Stripper" and "Broccoli". Does it feel good to be so busy? "There was this episode of *Teletubbies*," says Sharpley by way of reply, referring to the BBC's cult TV programme for toddlers, "where they said, 'Today the Teletubbies have been very busy!' And what that meant was the Teletubbies jumping up and down, going, 'Very busy, very busy, very busy!' Sharpley bounces around the room. "I felt this was possibly applicable to us." □ Hot Air releases are available direct from the label (tel/fax 0161 832 7991), or through These



"I think I may be their only remaining fan," says artist Thomas B Holmes, writing about 60s New York electronic rock group Silver Apples in his 1995 book *Electronic and Experimental Music*. Back then, the Silver Apples' name meant nothing. If they were remembered at all it was as a footnote in the Stoode story. Stoode recalls Alan Vega used to see Silver Apples as a prime influence on their weird New Orleans. Nothing else sounded quite like Silver Apples when they set out as a duo in 1968, playing a stark, yet pulsating and mesmerising take on rock 'n' roll that pushed far beyond anything that even the most talented psychadelic guitarist was capable of producing at the time. Although the psychedelia era's urge for experiments inevitably led to groups meddling with electronics (The United States Of America, Fifty Foot Hose and Lothar And The Hand People being three of the more intriguing sine-wave surfing rock artists), it was Silver Apples alone who, from the beginning, dared abandon all other instrumentation to reach out and capture the sound of tomorrow.

The trouble with being ahead of your time is the decades it takes for the world to catch up. Silver Apples sank amid legal wrangles after only two albums. The experience was so traumatic that their founder, Simeon Coxe, self-same inventor of

that positive, if belated tipping in Coxe's career is only the latest in a series of adventures which began in the early 60s when he left New Orleans at the age of 21 to try and make it as a painter in New York. He was quickly drawn to a local art scene called the Cedar Street Tavern, where other painters, including William De Kooning, Franz Kline, and Philip Guston, jazz musicians and poets, including LeRoi Jones aka Amiri Baraka, used to gather. One night he was introduced to composer Howard Clayton and his wife, who promptly dragged him to a car on Avenue A and 3rd where Sun Ra and His Arkestra were playing. Simeon remembers that Sun Ra was using plenty of electronics the night he saw him. The budding painter/impresario was instantly impressed by the power of The Arkestra's performance, even though he wasn't entirely enamoured of Ra's social graces.

"Their complete abandonment of existing boundaries had the effect of freeing me from mine," recalls Simeon now. "But I remember once sitting at his table and thinking that he was something of a social phony. He sat on a music case or something so he could be higher up than everybody else. It was like having an audience with a member of some kind of spaced-out pseudo-royalty. He would issue pronouncements without regard for the conversation taking place. It seemed

oscillate wildly

their extraordinary ur-electronic instrument, the Simeon, retired from music altogether and went back to painting. But with the 21st century looming ever closer, the time is now for Silver Apples. Today, their self-titled first album and its follow-up *Contact* are accepted as classic examples of early oscillator driven rock. The extent of their reach is evidenced by a recent Silver Apples tribute album, *Electronic Evocations*, featuring 90s versions of the group's songs by such UK and US post-rock and electronic units as Windy & Carl, Third Eye Foundation and Flowchart.

The protagonist of this sudden new surge of interest is Dominic Marin, whose Enraptured label gathered together the various groups' contributions for the tribute album "I'd been a Silver Apples fan for quite a while," says Marin. "I bought the original LPs on the recommendation of various people and they just blew me away. I later had the idea of putting out a tribute record and, although I'm not a big tributes fan, it really started to take shape quite quickly. Dave Pearce from Flying Saucer Attack put me on to Matt [Eholt] of Third Eye Foundation. Then bands I'd approached for future singles, like Flowchart and Windy & Carl, all suddenly became keen."

The first pressing of *Electronic Evocations*, originally a 10" mini LP, quickly sold out. The enthusiastic response prompted a full length CD version, this time featuring nine groups. Even more positively, its reception drew Silver Apples' founder Simeon Coxe out of retirement.

"It was at this stage that Simeon got in touch," continues Marin. "He'd stumbled across the 10" in a New York record shop and loved it. I think more than anything, he was taken by the sincerity of the various bands' versions of his songs. It probably came over to him like a breath of fresh air. From there things developed, to the point where he wanted to record again. Luckily for us he remembered Enraptured and so we were able to put out the 'Fractal Flow' 7" together." Indeed, things have been going so well that Coxe has put together a new Silver Apples trio for live and recording dates.

like an act to me."

After Ra, Clayton introduced Simeon to electronic composer Hal Rodgers. It was a productive encounter. First, Rodgers composed a piece inspired by one of Simeon's paintings. Then Rodgers showed him the oscillator he had hooked up to his stereo system. It was the first time the young artist had seen an electronic instrument close up. He was so fascinated by the alien sounds it produced that he spent hours goofing around, coaxing them from the machine.

"When he invited me to come up to hear his new oscillator, I thought he meant oscilloscope," remembers Coxe. "I just thought it would be cool to listen to music and watch the display on the tube. Instead he was messing with this crazy thing and I was instantly fascinated. He laboured intently and in frustration to get his intonation right, but what I loved was that you could just sweep around and create energies and textures. I was hooked."

Once Simeon had acquired the instrument from Rodgers, it became known as the 'grandfather oscillator', and would be the foundation of the future Silver Apples sound. Electronic composition might have fired Simeon's imagination (he was aware of the electronic experiments of both Cage and Stockhausen), but his loyalties were still rock based.

"I have never been particularly attracted to electronic music in its pure or serious form," explains Simeon. "My background in music is mostly rock. When I became interested in electronics it was from the standpoint of its application to a rock expression. I have always thought of Silver Apples as being a kick-ass rock band. We just don't play guitars."



From photographer/folk musician Larry Siegel, Simeon learned basic notation and how to improvise. Siegel introduced his pupil to film maker Rudy Burkhardt who invited Simeon to compose the sound effects for a Jules Verne-styled spool movie he was working on called *Shoot the Moon*. That same year (1963) Simeon followed Siegel to a summer camp in Fabville, Connecticut where he worked as a dish washer. To pass the time he formed a group, The Random Concept. After a couple of years of roadwork they moved to New York, checking in at the Albert Hotel — a popular base for rock groups as the corner allowed them to rehearse in the basement. The Random Concept shared the space with The Cover Spookin', Mike Bloomfield and his group, Idle Wind and Frank Zappa's Mothers Of Invention.

"All the talk we got from the other bands was about sex and drugs, hardly anybody ever talked about rock 'n' roll," complains Simeon. "The Albert was party time. This was before Silver Apples, so even Zappa didn't think of me in terms of electronics."

The Random Concept fell apart when the drummer left to join The Commodores. The others returned to Connecticut, leaving Simeon behind to look for work. He eventually got a job as vocalist for The Overland Stage Electric Band, a house band at New York's infamous Cafe Wha? The group would perform cover versions of Doors

hits, which Simeon decided to spice up one night by plugging his oscillator into a spare amp. The resulting short, electric feedback did not amuse his fellow musicians. Undeterred by their negative response, Simeon was soon busily (and nervously) wiring more electronics into the group's equipment to produce sounds that were not only alien to most rock audiences, but were quite literally, shocking.

"Aggression is cool," he says. "I didn't care about the danger. I had been shocked pretty badly, non-lethal enough to be taken to the hospital, but it didn't kill me so I just figured it was part of the process. I hadn't a clue. I burned up more gear and blew more fuses than I can count."

As Simeon's electronic experiments became wilder, the group began to distance themselves from him. One day they rolled out of town leaving Simeon, his machines and their drummer Danny Taylor behind. Taylor had once played alongside Jimi Hendrix, so he wasn't so easily perturbed by unnatural noises. On the contrary Simeon impressed him greatly. They decided to form a duo and named themselves Silver Apples after a line in Yeats' poem "The Wandering Angus" (the same source for electronic composer Morton Subotnick's computer composition *Silver Apples Of The Moon*).

After 30 years of universal neglect, New York's **Silver Apples** are finally getting recognition for their pioneering electronic rock. Words: Edwin Pouncey

Above: Silver Apples, 1997 vintage. Left: Simeon Cox. Far left: Simeon circa 1968



Now with a greater sense of purpose, Simeon began working on a new machine made up of Hal Rodger's oscillator, connected with two switch-operated oscillators — mounted on plywood so they could be played with the feet — and a table-top keyboard made up of telegraph keys, all of them painted different colors so he could tell them apart in a darkened concert hall (an idea that soon came unstuck when a psychedelic, left-field show was included as part of the venue's ambience). The results were not always satisfactory.

"My methodology was to start with a simple audio generator and feed its output through various found bits of circuitry and see what happened," explains Simeon. "Many times it made more smoke than music. One time I got so frustrated with the mess that I hurled the whole thing out of a second-story window where it dangled from its various wires for two weeks. Tourists were taking pictures of it."

Despite these technical problems, Silver Apples managed to get a deal with a small label called Kapp. The duo moved their equipment into a cramped studio and, because the assigned producer never showed up, began recording their debut album by themselves. The reaction they received from the house engineers was a mixture of apathy, mistrust and disbelief.

"I think they were afraid of us," says Simeon. "They were afraid that their association with us, if we were ridiculed, would mean the end of their careers. I must have broken one too many rules that night back then, when people had a set idea, even agenda, about what rock was. There is more openness now."

Simeon and Danny gained confidence as the session progressed, and soon they were looking to flesh out the record with fresh song ideas. To achieve the sounds for a score to poet Stanley Warren's "Lovefingers," Simeon started work on yet another

ambitious electronic instrument. Much to the embarrassment of its inventor, it became known as the "Simeon." It involved nine extra oscillators packed together and wired into the telegraph keyboard, and a bass foot pedal to produce a shifting chord drone. It produced some spectacular results, but it wasn't without problems.

"After the first couple of times playing it, it became apparent that it was going to be impossible to do any serious touring with this monstrosity. After a lot of trial-and-error we ended up building it in sections that we could hook together at the venue. In that sense, today's version is no improvement. It's still an awkward bitch to travel with, bulky and fragile."

"The Simeon was always in a state of flux and development," he continues. "I guess there would have been about four Simeons in the past. The one I am playing now has already gone through one metamorphosis, so it's The Simeon Mark VI. When I reformed the band I was determined that I wasn't going to call it The Simeon anymore. That wasn't my idea in the first place; it was a label type thing. It isn't in my nature to go around naming things after myself, but I suppose I'm stuck with it."

The first Silver Apples album was released by Kapp in 1968, sporting a striking silver cover upon which two apples had been stenciled in black ink. The music inside described a then unique hybrid of rock dynamics, courtesy of Taylor's tuned drum kit, wayward electronics and poetry supplied by acquaintances of the group. "Oscillations" was issued as a single, and much to everybody's amazement managed to get into Philadelphia's Top Ten. The album's other notable song was "Program," which features an early example of radio sampling, an experiment that, across the water in London, was being duplicated more studiously by AMM guitarist Keith Rowe.

"Sampling was not a known phenomenon at the time," remarks Simeon. "At least not to me anyway, but I felt the need to do more with the song than just perform it straight. I puzzled over it for days, then one day it hit me to do just what the guy in the song is doing, dial a radio from left to right, searching for sounds. We recorded it with

a compilation of samples from several dialing sessions, but when we played it live we never used live radios."

In the course of a promotional US tour audience reaction ranged from redneck hostility to open-arm acceptance, depending on which state they were playing. In San Francisco they met and stayed with Peppen of The Grateful Dead ("We mostly just shot pool and talked about motorcycles together," says Simeon) who helped arrange some free gigs for the group. In late 1968 Simeon and Taylor began working off the second Silver Apples album Contact for Kapp (now available on CD from Simeon's Whirlybird label). This time they were given the freedom of a 24-track recording studio with a board that resembled the console of a jet airliner. This was pungently mirrored on the cover of the record, where Simeon and Danny are photographed inside the cockpit of a real Pan Am jet airliner surrounded by close-smoking ephemera. The back cover is a grainy black-and-white collage showing the duo sitting among the wreckage of an actual Swedish air disaster, the inference being that these two stoned hippies have hijacked a jet and crashed it. Real life disaster for the Apples struck, however, when Pan Am threatened to sue for \$100,000. Simeon and Danny decided to lay low. Years later, Simeon is still astonished by the airline's reaction, but remains unrepentant. "I am still not sure I understand what all the fuss was about. Can't anybody take a joke?" he despairs.

Pan Am's libel action was the first nail in the original Silver Apples' coffin. The next blow came when their manager secretly instated a lawyer who advised him to confiscate the group's equipment and hold it against payment of debts the project had incurred. Simeon and Danny got wind of the plot and managed to squirm away. The Simeon and Danny's drums at a friend's house. That uncle to perform or record without failing foul of the law suit. Silver Apples fell apart. Enough material for a third

album has been recorded at New York's Record Plant, but nobody was interested in releasing it. The tapes were eventually lost when the studio closed in 1990.

After finally getting his equipment back, Simeon attempted to relaunch Silver Apples (minus Danny) as a quartet, but after one gig at The Village Gate in 1970 he decided to give up music for painting.

"It took a three month sabbatical trip and a year of selling ice cream from a truck before I could clear out the intensities of the Silver Apples experience. It was another two years after that before I was able to do anything meaningful as an artist. The rock business can be hell on your edges," comments Simeon.

For the next 20 years Simeon concentrated solely on art. Then one day at an opening of an exhibition featuring some of his work, he was introduced to Xian Hawkins. The meeting was the chance that jolted Silver Apples back into life.

"Xian was doing sound for one of the bands playing at the opening party. He overheard me mention Silver Apples to one of the musicians and struck up a conversation I met Michael, our drummer, through Xian. Michael had never heard of Silver Apples, which I thought was kind of cool!"

The new Silver Apples have just recorded an album in Chicago with producer Steve Albini. Simeon says: "When word got out that we were going to be performing in Chicago last spring, a friend of his got in touch with me and said I should call Steve when I got there because he was a fan. So I did. We set the date to record. The sessions produced some awesome stuff. We recorded all 12 songs in two intensive days. There is no question that this is the best work Silver Apples has ever done."

After 30 years of neglect, Silver Apples have finally come through. "All the external forces involved were like a crowbar prising my fingers off the paintbrush. There was something cosmic about meeting Xian and having it all open up for me. I couldn't ignore it. Besides, I love music, always have." □ Silver Apples tour the UK this month see Soundings for details. For details of the availability of past and future Silver Apples releases, go to their website at www.silverapples.com. Thanks to Phil McMullen for information and assistance with this article.





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The apocalyptic post-Industrial folk of **Current 93** emerges from David Tibet's vision of an adult world bereft of happiness. In its place he has set up an underground Eden for like-minded artists, musicians and writers. Words: David Keenan. Photography: Tim Kent

"I'm in Walthamstow, East London, with Current 93's David Tibet. We're talking 'puppet theology.' " "I was obsessed with Noddy," Tibet states matter-of-factly. "I took a load of acid on the top of the house where Rose McDowell [of Strawberry Switchblade] was living and I had a vision of Noddy crucified in the sky and it really impressed me — as you would expect," he adds, laughing. "The next day I just went mad for buying Noddy. Before I'd seen him crucified I wasn't any more interested in him than any other kid who's read Noddy as a child. I was taking such a huge amount of speed at the time that I had a massive amount of energy so I just started hovering around and would come back with bin-liners full of anything with Noddy on. Rugs, mugs, jugs, didn't matter, bought it all, to the extent that I started wandering round London wearing a red Noddy hat with a bell on the end. Which was possibly not a good move to make in terms of fashion — I was very keen on Noddy."

This is not what I expected. I'd arrived in Walthamstow this evening with a half-scratched image in my head of Tibet as some austere and black-draped prophet of apocalypse, an image I'd built up through rated consumption of Current 93's large back catalogue of 'nursery rhymes and eschatological imagery'. To discover that the creator of the terror-howl depths of such seminal documents as 1984's *Nature Unveiled* and *Dogs Blood Song* is in fact as funny, amiable and charismatic as his long-term musical sparring partner and closest friend Steven Stapleton (or Nurse With Wound) shouldn't really come as a surprise.

Like Stapleton, Tibet is wary of publicity, worries about being misquoted or misunderstood, or about coming across as 'too didactic'. He's also fed up with London and contemplating disappearance. When I meet him he's just returned from a three week trip to the States — where Current 93 enjoy a huge and fanatical following — which he undertook to call on Tiny Tim's widow. One of the 20th century's last true troubadours, Tiny Tim was a walking encyclopaedia of popular song, from vaudeville through Broadway to Tin Pan Alley. Having released three Tiny Tim albums on his Durto label, Tibet remains close-knit with the singer. In fact he seems constantly drawn towards misfits, outsiders and artist who pursue a unique and uncompromising vision, often at the cost of recognition and fame. As such he's quick to evangelise about Tiny. "I miss tiny so much," he moans. "One of the most moving and profound people I've ever met. I loved him so much and I was devastated when he died. I was the last person to speak to him on the phone. He said to me, 'You must weather the storm, Tibet.' To me he was the greatest genius of popular song ever. It's tragic that people still perceive him as some kind of one-hit comedy turn."

We're sitting in Tibet's study, on the first floor of an old foliage-draped semi, surrounded by his favourite paintings. Louis Wain's joyous cat sketches take up the whole of one wall, while Charles Sims's beautifully eerie ghost-like pieces hang by the window, next to a pair of Tiny Tim's shoes. Books on Christian theology, ghost stories by Vincent O'Sullivan, *Studies Of Death* by SE Stenbeck — the homosexual drug addict, alcoholic late 19th century poet/writer of eerily hallucinogenic works whose posthumous work Tibet publishes through his Durto book imprint — bottle for shelf space amid religious icons, Steven Stapleton artwork and CD overflow. Two

huge, flickering candles illuminate the room as we discuss *Swoosikos For Noddy*, the landmark 1986 Current 93 album that saw Tibet shed the last lingering associations with his Industrial past and marked his heading plunge into "apocalyptic folk and menstrual minstrels". In other words, he forsakes the back-masked, looped noscapes of his early work for more directly communicative acoustic music.

"For me," Tibet continues, "Noddy was the total epitome of innocent childhood. What could be the most unsuitable thing you could give to Noddy for a present? I left probably swoosikas. It then became *Swoosikos For Noddy* on some releases because I started thinking that Noddy was — er, I was taking a lot of speed at the time — that Noddy was in fact a Gnostic icon. This was round about the same time I became interested in Punch and Judy and was seriously thinking that it might be worth... I mean, I probably wasn't well at the time mentally, but I thought it might be good to start worshipping Punch and Judy. I don't know why. Having decided that Noddy is a Gnostic deity, then it's really a small step in thinking that I might as well worship Punch and Judy. Having been obsessed by Christ for so long, and since Noddy had appeared in the sky crucified, and since Christ was God, therefore Noddy was also God, so he was a Goddy. My mind started going into other ramifications — whole puppet theology."

CHILDHOOD'S END

David Tibet was born in a converted stable ("Couldn't have been any other way," he suggests playfully) in the north of Malaysia in 1960, a place called Baru Gajah (meaning 'Stone Elephant') near Ipoh. "I was in Malaysia for about 14 years," he recalls. "I loved it. My childhood in Malaysia was practically perfect and I really miss it a lot. I dream about it a lot.

It echoes in my soul always. It reverberates, and as you get older and you lie in bed and you think, the rain sounds like it's the monsoon coming. I was always interested in religion so I used to spend a lot of time in the temples, Buddhist temples, Hindu temples, I remember all of it."

His parents finally moved back to the UK in 1973 just in time for Tibet to develop a glam rock habit. "I bought *Raw Power* by Iggy And The Stooges when it came out," he explains. "When I was in Malaysia I liked T Rex and Alice Cooper and then I got to like David Bowie because, like them, he wore make-up, and then I bought *[Lou Reed's] Transformer*. The New York Dolls were wearing a lot of make-up so I bought them. I used to quote like The Sweet as well, 'Blockbuster' and 'Heilraiser'. Chicory Tip were hopeless, though."

He continues. "When I went to university in 1978 to Newcastle-Upon-Tyne I liked The Sex Pistols, bought 'Anarchy In The UK', and a few years before that I started liking Amon Dau 2, mainly because of 'Archangel's Thunderbird'."

Tibet gradually gravitated towards the then nascent Industrial scene — specifically groups like Throbbing Gristle, Whitehouse and Nurse With Wound. Such groups transformed their sense of alienation into powerful interrogations of systems of control, be they aesthetic, cultural or political. Their questioning led them down some decidedly bizarre roads, and one of the most useful side products of Industrial culture is the vast archive of esoteric and arcane knowledge its participants amassed over the years. For the young Tibet a large part of their appeal was their decidedly anti-rock 'n' roll stance. Non-musicians were beginning to create some of the most extreme (sonic and visual) examples of outsider invention, releasing it themselves in

limited edition runs complete with handmade covers. These groups had taken the DIY and democratic art ideals of punk rock and married them to an avant garde sensibility. Not unnaturally, given its self-inflicted brief to expose the inner processes of the entertainment industry, industrial imagery could be excessively bleak or ugly.

Coming to London ostensibly to study Tibetan — “I was always going on about Tibet, so people started calling me it,” Tibet recalls — he became a regular at Throbbing Gristle gigs. He gradually got to know Genesis P-Orridge, who asked him to join his new group Psychic TV once Throbbing Gristle decided to “terminate their mission”. He played on the *Themes* album that came free with Psychic TV’s debut *Force The Hand Of Chance*, the former being a ritualistic workout on massed Tibetan tibiphone trumpets. Increasingly active, Tibet also played with the percussion-heavy, proto-ethnic-Ambient trance outfit 23 Skidoo. But it didn’t take long for things to turn sour in Psychic TV’s Temple Of Psychic Youth. “I did a tiny bit of recording on their second album, *Dreams Less Sweet*,” explains Tibet, “but I didn’t get on with P-Orridge any longer so I left the group to concentrate on my own music. We’d already done the first Current record when I was still in PTW with John Balance [founder of Coil] and Fritz Haarmann from Skidoo, the ‘LASHTAL’ 12”.

Released on the LAYLAH label in 1983, “LASHTAL” is a prototype of the desolate, haunted soundtracks, the “waking dreams”, that would define early Current 93: muffled percussive thundering beneath walls of dark, muttering voices and distant foghorns. One fortuitous meeting, however, would change everything.

“At the Equinox event I met Steve Stapleton,” Tibet recalls, referring to the 1983 festival of industrial culture held at the London Musicians’ Collective. “I was introduced by Jordi Valls who had a group called Vagina Dentata Organ. When I met Stapleton we just clicked immediately. I think he’s the greatest musical genius of the century and when I first met him I suddenly thought this will be my closest friend ever; I don’t know why. I asked if he’d work on my first album and we started meeting quite regularly, and he also asked me down to the IPS studio in Shepherds Bush; he had every Friday block-booked, all year. He asked me to come and start recording with him there, which of course I did, and then he asked me if I’d join Nurse With Wound. The first thing I did was Ostracism 1973 which was a re-working of a side of Herzfeld Schweiß and a side of *To The Queer Men From A Tiny Girl*. Steven and I got on so well and we did a concert as Dogs Blood Order, doing ‘Maledor Is Dead’.”

Although by this time Current 93 were already up and running, John Balance’s reluctance to leave Psychic TV made it difficult for the group to perform as such. Instead, Tibet performed twice under the name Dogs Blood Order. “Then a friend of mine was working at the Roundhouse studio and got free time there,” Tibet continues. “He was an engineer, and he said, ‘Do you want to come in and do an album?’ We went in and did the A-side of *Nature Unveiled* as Current. Steve came down along with John Fothergill, who was then in Nurse as well.”

Nature Unveiled was a landmark release for the British underground, a free-floating assemblage of distant chorales, alien chant and sonic depth charges ascending into a buzzball of static and noise. Inspired by the uncompromising vision of the likes of Stapleton, Tibet created a unique document of all his then current obsessions. His

refusal to reference anything else happening at the time helped define Current 93’s future working process. With the help of a floating group of contributors, Tibet set out to create his own hermetic soundscape, which, both musically and in its business practice, operated completely independently of the music industry. In time, he and like-minded individuals like Nurse With Wound and Coil established a worldwide network of fans, who would often be inspired to establish their own musical cells, thereby strengthening and furthering the network’s reach.

As Tibet sees it, “Current’s music is really, really simple. It begins with possibly just one sound that I like. For *Nature Unveiled*’s “Maledor Is Dead” it was a loop of Aleister Crowley saying, ‘Om, Om! I had lyrics and I had, most importantly of all, an idea of the atmosphere I wanted. I described it to Steve as being like a hypnotic dream that sped up as we came to the end of it because at that time I was just so obsessed with the apocalypse. I felt things were just telescoping really quickly, it was all just spiraling quickly, quickly, which is what “Maledor” does. I told Steve this and I played him the loop, told him the lyrics, and I said it has to have the stately slow motion of a dream when it’s starting. It’s often very slow; people’s gestures are like shadow puppets — full of meaning, it seems, but they’re not actually doing very much. It’s like a shadow thrown by a candle onto the wall, it’s distorted, everything is emphasised, exaggerated. By the end it becomes frantic like somebody shuffling or dealing cards. I would say all these sorts of things to Steve and he would do it, he would understand exactly what I wanted.”

Stapleton became Current’s vital other half and over the course of records like the strange graveyard dream of 1985’s *In Henstruef Night*, they took their accidentally evolved working process to the extreme. Then they hit a creative dead end.

“I did an album, *Dawn*, which I was really ashamed of doing in the sense that it was just so easy to do,” Tibet confesses. “It was in the style of *Nature Unveiled*, a long 20-minute piece made of loops, various sounds coming in, and some sort of structure. I did it so quickly, I just felt I’d become lazy, it wasn’t moving me any more, it was simply-made mechanical weirdness. I felt it was moving away from the most important thing, which was the centrality of emotion, of trying to get across what I was feeling. It had become too formalised, I needed to return to what moved me, which was nursery rhymes and folk music. Not Folk rock, just really simple unadorned melodies, maybe no choruses, just direct, a minute or two long. So *Swanosis For Noddy* marked my decision to rethink the way that I expressed the emotions that I felt about the things that were moving me.”

Tibet’s discovery of Shirley Collins’s legendary folk recordings for Topic and Harvest, *The Power Of The True Love Knot*, *Love Death And The Lady* and, in particular, *Anthems In Eden*, was a major factor in his conversion. “Savage Pencil, Edwin Pouncey, once said to me, ‘You should really listen to Shirley Collins’.” I didn’t know who she was but when I heard her I became completely obsessed, and I realised that she was able to express so much with the minimum of arrangements, not even using her own words, using words that had been sung by 100,000 people. Her direct involvement in the incredibly moving melancholy she was creating made me realise



“I started thinking that Noddy was in fact a Gnostic icon. I was taking a lot of speed at the time”

that it was possible to get that effect across without using loops."

Current 93's engineer David Kenny was also the in-house engineer for Topic Records, and was able to supply Tibet with a contact number for Collins. "I called her up and told her I worshipped her, and I'd like to put out an anthology of her recordings, and perhaps do an interview. She had no idea how influential she was." They got on so well that Tibet invited her to record with Current 93. But since she'd retired from singing she had no confidence in her voice. However, Tibet's persistence eroded her resistance and she duly recorded a talking part on the transitional *Thunder Perfect Mind* album, and went on to sing on *The Stones Are Marching Sadly Home*.

Although superficially a world away from the themes and approaches of Current's previous material, Tibet sees an obvious link between his early music and the subsequent Collins-influenced recordings — specifically his interest in eschatological imagery. "For me, folk music was all about endings and the effect that endings have on our lives. It would be easy to overstate the point and say yes, folk music is the 'working man's apocalyptic', or whatever. It's not the case at all, of course, but there was that incredible sense of beautiful melancholy. So moving and so pure, so honest and so human. That's what I really always wanted to express with Current, the importance of our humanity. If we don't have our humanity then we've got nothing, it's all that we have and yet, in that, terrible things happen. And folk expresses that and also a way of coming to terms with that, and seeing beyond it, going on. Life continues."

1988's *Earth Covers Earth* took Tibet's new found passion further. The package was completed with a beautiful cover photograph of the entire Current 93 'family' (which at that point included Rose McDowell, and Tony Wakeford, then of Sol Invictus). However it wasn't until *Thunder Perfect Mind* (1991) that Tibet felt his music was finally getting across what he wanted to say.

"With *Thunder Perfect Mind* I started writing about friends of mine, about how I felt about things, and then with *Of Ruine Or Some Blooming Stain* it became a specifically autobiographical record. I think Current became a lot purer for me. It's also because I met Michael Cashmore [who also plays in his own group, Nature And Organisation] who was able, unfailingly, to enumerate musically on the guitar exactly what I wanted to say. So between Steve and him they were both able in their respective areas of expertise to come up with what I was wanting to get across. It all worked seamlessly. Since then I feel the music's become better and better and also, equally important for me, more and more simple. Something I always liked was simplicity and space, and I think Current's work has become more and more aligned to what I wanted it to be at the beginning. When I was younger the music that moved me so much was people like The Ronettes or Peggy March, early liturgical music and so on. I always felt that I wanted to make music that would move others as much as the music that I loved moved me."

That music really began to emerge with last year's genre-defying *Inmost Light* trilogy, *Where The Long Shadows Fall*, *The Stones Are Marching Sadly Home* and, in particular, *All The Pretty Little Horses*. With contributions from Shirley Collins and Nick Cave, who had been introduced to Tibet by a mutual friend, Geoffrey Cox-Doree, the latter album represents a devastatingly moving and sometimes upsetting synthesis of Tibet's obsessions. Built round the traditional children's song of the same title, the tiny bells and spectral guitars on *Pretty Little Horses* ring out like a testament to childhood lost forever, while Tibet's heartfelt voice speaks from beneath Stapleton's collage of

doctored voices, haunted choral loops and random electronics.

"*All The Pretty Little Horses* is definitely my favourite," sighs Tibet. "I think I'm so interested in childhood because when I was a child was the last time I was ever happy. As we get older and we become more and more unhappy, and as we see more and more the terrible state of the world and the terrible things it does to us, and that we also do back to it, that childhood becomes more and more perfect. In itself it isn't so, but the experience of... The Japanese have the phrase, 'Homo No Aware', and the Tibetans say, 'khor bai nyes drags', which means 'the Sadness of Things', that this life is not as it should be and we know that's the case and so we desperately try and find a time when the world was as we pictured it as a child, full of marvels, mysteries, full of wonder, full of joy and innocence. I think one of the most important things about humans and about humanity, therefore, is that we carry within us a belief in redemption, that we can redeem ourselves somehow, and I think, harking back to the innocence of childhood, there's one way

that we start to do that. For myself, when I think back to a girlfriend that I used to go out with in 1980 or whatever, now I think about her with incredible longing and love and think how perfect it was. But of course the reality wasn't like that at all, which is why we split up. So we paint the past in a way that appeals to our sense of recovering the paradise that we've lost."

We talk of future plans, of the new Current 93 collaboration with the macabre American novelist Thomas Ligotti, whom Tibet considers to be "the greatest living writer". After stumbling across Ligotti's first short story collection, Tibet became an obsessive fan of the writer's "terrible vision" which combines gruesome HP Lovecraft-like imagery with a Kafkaesque sense of the bizarre. A working relationship grew out of the correspondence they established, resulting in the *In A Foreign Land* project. This release consists of a beautiful cloth-bound book by Ligotti (published by Dutro) and a Current 93

disc that somewhat ironically, given its line-up of Tibet, Stapleton, Christoph Heemann and Shirley Collins, marks a slight return to the earlier space-thrash pieces. All tone pulse and treated electronics, Stapleton and Heemann here provide minimal Krautrock-inspired backdrops for Tibet's and Collins' occasional interjections of text. "I think the Ligotti CD is absolutely wonderful," states Tibet unashamedly. "The next album we've started on already. It's very simple, very spacious, more of a follow on from *All The Pretty Little Horses*. Hopefully it'll be out in February/March." Also forthcoming early next year is a book of Tibet's lyrics, and a record with Steven Stapleton and Shirley Collins is promised.

I'm getting late and Tibet sees me to the door. Outside, silence reigns in the moonlit street. "What permeates life completely, I believe, is The Inmost Light," Tibet concludes. "The secret glory, this is whatever you want to call it, the presence of Christ in everything. It is there and if we don't find it before we die then we're doomed. We must find it, we must, it's the only thing we've made for, to try and get even just a glimpse of the glory that lies behind everything that's hidden from us. The world seems to be disappointing and full of suffering, because we just can't see what's shining behind it all. And it's the only thing which is important. Although there is that incredible transcendence at the same time — although that is a reason for great joy and a feeling that there is something, there is more than just this — at the same time if we miss the chance to get it, that's it, we don't get second chances." □ Current 93 releases are distributed by World Serpent

Steve Stapleton's artwork for *In A Foreign Land*, *In A Foreign Land*



invisible juke

Every Valentine we play a different 7" series of records which they're asked to identify and comment on — with no identification codes or titles. It's a bit like a game. Then maybe it's the USA 45.

Van Dyke Parks

Played by Rishi Dhillon

He's been around for a long time, achieving book status in the 1960s with *Music for a而去*. Now, 30 years later, he's still doing what he's doing, making music. Like him, I'm not sure what to be anymore. He's not from the old guard, or a new guard, and he's not from anywhere in between. For me, he's a kind of a legend, a legend that's not yet been recognized. He started in folk records in 1962, and then moved to Warner Bros. in '65, where he was working with Brian Wilson of The Beach Boys. After leaving, he co-produced Faculty Reunion and Ry Cooder's first albums, and many other productions followed. His own albums, *My Song* (1967), *Desperate America* (1971), *Many Of One* (1974), *Reaper* (1976), *June 13th*; *Tokyo Rose* (1980), *Orange Crate Art* (1995), as other production efforts (with Andrew Weisblum) include *Ph! Ochs & Greatest Hits* (Asph), and *The Mortarons* (F. Atlantic), as well as string arrangements — his favorite medium — for Leo Kottke, Tim Buckley, Bruce Springsteen, Ry Cooder, Van Phillips, Steve Redway, Little Feat, Keith Moon, Ringo Starr and Harry Nilsson, among many others. His newest release is provocatively titled *Moonlighting Like At the Ash Grove*.

MARVIN GAYE

"The Star Spangled Banner" from Marvin Gaye: *The Master 1961-1984* (Motown)

[Hears screams of audience] Where was this done? Fenway Park?

It was taped at the LA Forum at a Lakers basketball game. It's interesting, as this song fundamentally celebrates a plantation economy, and I can understand how blacks feel left out of that, and that they're trying to reconcile it, they want to be part of it. [Listens] Marvin didn't get with the band too long on that particular performance.

It was in his "Sexual Healing" phase, where the Roland 808 was the crucial item.

That's OK. It was genuine. He worked within the system and the system worked fine.

ARTO LINDSAY

"Child Prodigy" from *O Corpo Sotô* (Bykodisc)

[Bursts out laughing at intervals in response to Lindsay's lyrics] I want to see what this guy looks like. [Examines cover] Where is he from?

He grew up in Brazil. His parents were missionaries. He's lived in Manhattan since the '70s, worked with David Byrne, produces Brazilian artists. He started off in a noisy group called DNA.

I heard him on National Public Radio and he sounded interesting. I liked him. He's schizophrenic in a sense, he follows his madness in a very public way with no apology. The free relation in the lyrics reminds me a lot of what Loudon Wainwright does, which is a lot less musically informed, but it's the same ilk, isn't it? [Looks at bookend] Does this guy perform? He should get the money, this guy should be a success, right? He deserves exposure and investigation. He draws from his North American and European exposure, too, don't you think?

GABBY PAHINUI WITH RY COODER

"Walkin' Hula" from *Gabby Bond Vol 2* (Panini)

[Immediately] Pahinui! This is important. [Points at speaker during mandolin passage] There's Ry [Cooder]. The strings, who did those?

Nick DeCaro.

I like Nick's work. That's a good line there. This is a case — can I be dumb for a while? — I'm not going to talk about how the music is so infectious and innocent. Fundamentally, the record is brought to us by an entrepreneur who is a performer. Essentially that's what's happening here, right? That was Ry Cooder over there, playing when Gabby was playing over there, in the same range. The same thing happened on the Madagascar album, *A World Out Of Time*, where the bottleneck solo comes in the middle of the nocturnal and the arboreal, and ranks my groove, because it dilutes the racation of the music. It makes it less specific, it homogenizes the music, and it becomes less strong, not because it's on a CD in the living room, but because we have infected it with our own souls, and I'm the guiltiest guy I know in terms of doing that, putting a footprint in the situation. I'd rather that the rats didn't jump off the anchor lines.

Don't you think that's inevitable at this point in history?

You can't tell that to a Hawaiian monarchist, and there are numbers of them. Gatsby is undeniably strong. I'm just saying that I like to hear the music less layered. It's an interesting thing about Hawaiian music, and it's something that Ray understands: it's like C&W, the cadence of these tunes. In these pre-missionary forms, when the people were building the words, they weren't necessarily thinking that everything was in 4/4, and isn't it nice? Like in C&W, where they'll put in an extra beat or two, just to say... something. By the way, why did you pick that particular cut?

I've always loved the string arrangement that surfaces at the end. It's like a kid trying to jump more stairs with each successive bound.

I'm not knocking strings. I like strings, that's different. They're so transparent, no matter what you do with them, it's easy to separate the strings out, and those were very imaginative. It's a diamond, that one.

RAKOTOZAFY

"Sammy Faly" from *Volto Madagascar* (Ocora)

This is from Madagascar, right? This is in a different realm of music than what we've listened to so far. This is transcendental, an absolutely flawless musical construction. It's incredible. This is an important artist, isn't he? He should be encouraged in any way possible. **Too late, I'm afraid. He's been dead for some time.**

Legend has it that he suffocated his son during practice for missing a beat, and killed him inadvertently, which led to his own demise.

Oh dear. That must have killed him [Pauses] You notice that the mode is hexatonic/dorian, that's what's been played here. The whole piece is an unprepared suspension, it starts in suspension and continues in suspension. It resolves in suspense until the very last note. Isn't it great? It's amazing! I never would have known that. The guy's filled with surprise and great intimacy. To tell the truth, he's calling from the grave. This is a great record. I haven't heard anything from Madagascar which is on this level of performance.

There are a great many valiha players, and I think they're all in awe of him.

My favorite songs have come from the 30s in Madagascar. I don't know why that was, maybe it was an age of discovery. Some cultural import, that they'd had just long enough to deal with things global, to maintain a musical stamp of their reaction to the world beyond, and I like that. I love the harp. I don't go to heaven when I hear it. I stay in heaven when I hear the harp. The intimacy and the power of it, [softly voice] it raises the Druid marmos in my bones.

FRAZ FRANZ WAXMAN

"Adventures Of Don Juan" from *50 Years Of Film Music* (Warner Bros.)

Komida? It's Max Steiner. Beautiful Samuel Barber, take a walk. That was brave, the interval of the second that he used finally as a modulating device. You know, you don't know whether to laugh or cry with this music. I think I've stopped caring whether to or not. I don't sneer at stuff as easily as I used to. This is potentially sneerable stuff.

because, well, it's terribly derivative. Max Steiner eschewed [sic] everything that he needed to from his European experience. The music had to be bombastic, it had to be bigger than a theater organ, so that it could be deemed progressive. Had to be louder. Force had to be loud.

People tend to think of orchestration as a separate function, no doubt due to the current rapidity of film scoring, but you can always tell who works hard. This is what Randy Newman's uncle [Alfred Newman, composer of over 250 film scores] used to call 'the bloodsheet', because it would indicate this. Very hard, to do a nice neat little bloodsheet.



JEFF BUCKLEY

"Last Goodbye" from *Grace* (Columbia)

Why should this sound familiar?

It's Jeff Buckley. That's son. [Of Buckley's recent death] Well that's a goddamned

shame, isn't it? Jim Keltner asked me to write an arrangement for him, and for some reason I couldn't do it. I wanted to, because I knew his dad [Parks] played keyboards on Tim Buckley's self-titled debut album on Elektra. Tim used to come over to my house all the time, we were pals, but he got strange. He was awesome, then he went from being totally immediate and available and communicative to being guarded and dark and unavailable. Tim got into heroin, which I never understood, and then he died. And the kid he had just died. Which makes someone both a widow and a bereaved mother double whammy. Very, very talented, Jeff Buckley. A sad story, a great record. Well produced, too.

MARTIN DENNY

"Exotica" from *Forbidden Island* (Scamp reissue)
[Upon hearing first bird call] Is that Chico Guemera? This is the "Quiet Village" guy

Yes, Martin Denny.

His percussionists used to make all these bird noises. Chico Guemera and Augie Colon. Isn't that funny? The one guy who was an exception to the trend of de-racializing global music was Milt Holland, the percussionist, who had negative commercial impact. He didn't make what anthropologists call a man-use day. He didn't leave a print on the sand. He was so gentle, so kind. He had more exotic percussion in his kit than anybody.

Holland's exotica-styled solo album has been reissued, a result of the recent lounge thing.

What do you know, the "lounge thing".

What do you know, ersatz tropical music made in the late 50s, that's back in vogue now. Music for bachelors with loads of disposable income and big barbecues in their backyards. Oh stereophiles [Giggles] Are you old enough to have heard the first train move from right to left? I remember that moment. Martin Denny, that's a fine piece of work. [Looks at bookshelf] There's Augie Colon and... oh my God, there's Julius Wechter.

He went from there to The Baja Marimba Band.

He's playing gamelan gongs on this one. And look who's the producer! Simon Warner [father of Parks' executive producer, Lenny Warner].

ASHA BHOSLE

"Yeh Na Thi" from *WOMAD Talking Book Vol 4 -- An Introduction To Asia 1 (WOMAD)*

[Upon hearing first song section (glossans)] Round up the usual suspects! I'll take this record, thanks. Is that a shawm?

A shawm. Same family, a double reed.

This is Indian, right? I want this one, this is great. There's not one false move in the whole deliberation. A high level of musicianship, and because it is — and that is no burden to it, because it's passionate music — it's absolutely winsome. I just love it.

I played it for you because of the arrangement that you did on the Sam Phillips record ["Baby I Can't Please You" from *Martin & Binki*]...

With the portamento strings [sings part] Yeah, but [Bhosle's arrangement] was precise. To wrap this stuff down, to understand it. I want to account for every second. I want to account for every move from top to bottom. I have an obsession. Music for me, at its best, is like a crossword puzzle or a Chinese box. It blows up under scrutiny. That's why I like this so much; there's architectural perfection here. The percussion is so precisely tuned, everyone plays in accord — when they want to. It almost makes the strings unnecessary. She delivers the song, she's born in the knowledge, and cultivated in it. An incredible woman. Pure sex, absolutely sensual, erotic experience and highly civilized and delicate, too. Everything that would have mattered to me when I had a body [laughs].

LORD KITCHENER

"My Pussy" from *Klassik Kitchener Vol Two (Ice)*

The golden age! The greatest melodist of our time. Here's the residual from the big band era, which the Trinidadians used to great advantage. I worked with Mighty Sparrow, who once posed as Kitchener's arch-enemy, and for whom Andy Wickham and I produced a project [*Hot And Sweet*, released in 1973 on Warner Bros.] of this intricacy in a day in Miami, during a hurricane! But Sparrow didn't achieve the dignity that this guy did. Lord Kitchener is a great character. The British put a humorous touch on every one of their colonies and today, of course, even with the return of Hong Kong, the sun still sets on that empire. But this place, Trinidad, really derived so much from the British I hear palm court music in this, and I hear the 19th century. This is the great stuff. I just love him. These gentlemen, they just tap at the beginning [demonstrates] and everyone comes in perfectly! Brings back a lot of memories, this does. I met Kitchener repeatedly. I went into his good graces. I knew all the Trinidadians in LA at one time, and they fed me when I was poor. This is my favourite music, though I've neglected it of late, probably because they've electrified it. I prefer the acoustic version. Kitchener, for my money, is as good as Schubert. □

On several occasions during the 60s and 70s, the writer and photographer Val Wilmer was granted access to the inner circle of **Sun Ra** and his Arkestra, where she was witness to his philosophy, music making, and everyday life. In this intimate portrait, part one in this month's two-part Sun Ra special, she spools through her memories of one of music's true enigmas



in the house of RA

The first time I heard Sun Ra play was in private. I was in New York, taking a second bite at the Apple, but whereas on my first visit I'd hung out with musicians who'd played with King Oliver and Charlie Parker, now, my connections informed me, the New Thing was what was happening, and the musicians who were really doing it were recording for the ESP-Disk label. A visit to Bernard Stollman, the New York lawyer who started the company, secured a batch of classic recordings and introduced me to, among others, Albert Ayler, Milford Graves, Sunny Murray and *The Heliocentric Worlds Of Sun Ra*. The constantly changing moods of the music on this last record, the contrasts of instruments, register and texture, the instrumentation (piccolos, trombones, the bass and timpani) duet between Ronnie Boykins and Johnnie Johnson, and the excursions into the arena of free improvisation all this was an extraordinary listening debut. Nevertheless, it was with only the vaguest idea of what he was about that I called up Mr Ra and made my way across town to Arkestra central.

This was the start of the Summer of Love for most of my peers, but as a dyed-in-the-wool jazzier who had headed straight for the Vanguard and Birdland rather than the Fillmore East, I barely knew where the Lower East Side was. But I was learning. African and Eastern-style clothing that yet to make much of an impact, even in the Village, and although en route to Sun Ra's I passed a few hippies and head shops, when I ran into saxophonist Nasir Aliwood, another ESP artist, he was dressed in a sober New Orleans suit.

Marshall Allen was different. The first Arkestra member I laid eyes on, he'd been out doing the shopping, but unlike other neighbourhood denizens with their brown paper bags clutched in their arms, a hint of something glittering and glamorous showed beneath the checked sports jacket he wore, despite the mid-morning heat. With his talish curls tumbling over a figured red headtie, he looked like a Mexican bandito. As he skipped up the steps of the decaying brownstone at 4B East Third Street, I followed closely behind.



who greeted me swathed in royal blue woolen material checkered over in black. A pleated turban perched on his head, with a ten-pointed star glistening metallically from its centre.

Our interview began in the usual way with me asking when and where he was born. Right away I ran into his lifelong obfuscation. Like Father Divine, Elijah Muhammad and

other African-Americans who discarded their 'slave-names', Sun Ra felt that by obscuring the early years of his life he could attract more attention for his goal of racial uplift and a wider understanding of his philosophy. At the same time he had hit on a method for keeping fear of death at bay. "I'm dealing with a philosophy of mathematical equations that's trying to eliminate the idea of people being born because if they're not born, they can't possibly die," he told me, without batting an eyelid. I searched for a handhold into the familiar. I knew he'd worked with Fletcher Henderson, the 'inventor' of swing, tell me about that. "We always played the same type of thing chordwise and thoughtwise, but playing those chords with Fletcher, I had trouble out of the band. They didn't understand it, so finally I quit. But Fletcher wouldn't hire another piano player, and I thought, well, since he plays piano himself, he knows what I'm doing. And so I came back."

"But a lot of musicians are backward, you'd be surprised. The band said they could play anything because they'd played music by the best arrangers in the land, but when I came back with arrangements on 'I Should Care' and 'Dear Old Southland', they tried for two hours and they couldn't play it. It was subtle." He brushed his fingers over his 'sun-harp', an elegant construction of brass rods welded into a star-shape and made for him by an admirer, and smiled benignly at the memory.

A plumpish man — in his mid-forties, I guessed — he spoke softly with a slight Southern drawl that called to mind the speech of blues musicians such as Memphis Slim and Roosevelt Sykes, whom I'd got to know on their recent visits to England. Back then, I had no other frame of reference, probably no bad thing because it enabled me to begin seeing him as a Southerner rather than Northern city-slicker, wise to the ways of New York. The truth was that I was quite unprepared for everything he was saying: the explanations of how his music was organised, the way he trained the Arkestra members, let alone the intricate philosophy and beliefs he espoused. In the course of the interview we discussed the polyrhythmic character of his music he had already begun using more than one drummer and he talked of the "multi-layering" of rhythms, contrasting his methodology to the 4/4 beat of conventional jazz — and he talked about the imminent arrival of flying saucers. He was, he said, "number one candidate for a trip into space." "I'm actually painting pictures of infinity with my music and that's why a lot of people can't understand it," he explained. "But if they'd listen to this and to other types of music, they'll find that mine has something else in it, something from another world."

the day, I realise that meeting with Sunny (as Sun Ra was also known) paved the way for a greater understanding of countless aspects of African-American life. It certainly prepared me for subsequent encounters with music, musicians and philosophies of which I'd never dreamed. But at the time I was a little nonplussed and unable to come to terms with a tongue-in-cheek commentary in which Saturn and the pyramids featured heavily. I approached the *MM* story in the somewhat facetious manner I felt that a popular publication required, but my less than respectful attitude also reflected my dubiousness about his identification with ancient Egypt and its role in the origin of African-Americans and the entire human race (I had yet to read Cheikh Anta Diop, the Senegalese author of *The African Origins Of Civilization*).

Sun Ra, it must be said, deliberately sought to confuse his questioners in order to retain the upper hand in what he (rightly) perceived as a treacherous world. My excuse for my own lack of understanding and empathy on our first meeting was that, culturally speaking, I was still way behind the ears. Nevertheless, the continuing failure of respect on the part of other commentators who should have known better would

hamper serious analysis of his work and ideas throughout his life and beyond. When he told me his main ambition was to play a concert in front of the Sphinx, no one could have dreamed that this would one day be realised. Back then Sun Ra was an underground legend and my main reason for wanting to meet him was an awareness that his dedication and staying power had earned him the approbation of other musicians whom I admired.

When our talk was over, Sunny summoned Marshall Allen and John Gilmore to participate in a photo session. Gilmore picked up a Chinese stringed instrument and strummed it; Allen began playing oboe, accompanied by a drummer named Herby Grinn (or was his name Herby Stewart? Either way, as far as I'm aware, he has never figured in any Sun Ra personnel listing). A sleepy Ronnie Boykins was summoned from somewhere in the depths of the apartment and instructed to pull a spangled dansku-like garment over his day clothes and bow a few notes on a stringed instrument called the dutar. Sunny himself played on one of his keyboards, stopping halfway through to don a shiny tunic and switch headgear, all with an eye to publicity.

Before I left he took me into the back room of the apartment where his book collection was housed. Volumes old and new tumbled from cupboards and lay stacked against the walls. He gave me a pile of his recent Saturn releases, among them *The Magic City and Fata in A Pleasant Mood*. Then, almost as an afterthought, pulled a book off the shelf for my edification: it was a well-worn copy of *Sex And Race* by Jamaican journalist JA Rogers. Eventually this would become available as a three volume exposition, but in the 1960s the original edition acquired fabled status where many black American intellectuals were concerned. Sun Ra suggested that because Rogers had traced the African descent of several European royal families his book might well remain a close-guarded secret. He showed me pamphlets and poetry he'd written and thrust an order form for more Saturn albums into my hand. All of this was done in the secretive, tongue-in-cheek manner that made you feel you were being uniquely drawn into his confidence, but which was one of the means by which he controlled his surroundings.

Control, I soon learned, was the name of his game. Not

“He talked about the imminent arrival of flying saucers. He was, he said, number one candidate for a trip into space”

John Gilmore



only did he use it to retain the autonomy necessary for a black man to operate in what for most of his life he'd experienced as a segregated society, but by keeping a tight rein on his musicians, many of whom lived with him in the Sun Studio, he could play his music at any time of the day or night, for as long as and whenever he wanted. He laid down a strict code of behaviour: Arkestra members soon learned to avoid drugs and alcohol, and intimate human relationships. He did recognise the existence of some established marriages but for others, sexual relationships were rare, only conducted with his permission. There were times when a spouse was allowed to accompany their musician to the gig, but casual women friends brought to the house were discouraged and could even be insulted if Sunny thought they might be responsible for distracting a man from his higher goals. Not surprisingly, many musicians were not prepared to submit to this degree of control and, as I discovered later, even his most faithful acolytes were known to rebel. But it was only when a friend of mine started going out with his favourite drummer that I learned all I needed to know about Sunny's misogyny. Given all this, I suppose it always surprised me that he should show me such courtesy and friendship. However, apart from the fact that I was the first English person to interview him, perhaps even the first from Europe, he did seem, quite genuinely, to like me.

In 1968 Marshall Allen's father offered The Arkestra use of a house in Philadelphia, a move they welcomed, while continuing to play for the most part in New York City. I began to spend increasingly more time in New York around the period they were appearing regularly at Slug's Saloon, a sawdust-on-the-floor joint on East Third Street, a few blocks from where they were living when we first met. On Mondays, traditionally musicians' night off in the city's jazz clubs, a motley crew of aficionados gathered at this funky neighbourhood bar, primed to dig sounds from Outer Space. Located between Avenues C and D in what became known as Alphabet City, and with no local subway, it was hard to get cab drivers to go there. It was, in short, a 'dangerous' area for outsiders — just how dangerous was made clear to me by saxophonist Dewey Redman. Leaving the bar one night, he was stopped by a thug who demanded his horn; he gave it up without a word of protest. But Slug's was a vital nurturing ground for the new music, and if you wanted to know what was happening, you had to be there. Every Monday in September 1972 I'd trek across the Village on foot to listen to The Arkestra who often played in near-darkness. With the only light source the torches attached to their headgear, they'd stroll up and down in the brick-walled bar, singing to the beat of James Jackson and John Gilmore at the drums. It was a magical experience, food for the soul. Physically, I



Sunny and friends, backstage, 1972

remained unscathed — although my heart did miss more than one beat the night I saw someone robbing at knifepoint in front of me.

Despite the increasing recognition for Sunny's music, The Arkestra's living conditions stayed spartan. But Philadelphia offered more space than the Lower East Side, and those musicians such as Gilmore and Allen who lived in the commune appeared resigned to continuing to trek into Manhattan. They'd drive or take a train, becoming a regular sight to Amtrak's early morning commuters. Sunny, whose ability to survive on catnaps was legendary, thought nothing of ending a five hour set at four in the morning, waiting outside Slug's while righthand man Richard Wilkinson loaded up the group's bus, then driving the 90 miles to Philly, to be up and receiving phone calls at 9.30. With growing acceptance he became more relaxed and accessible to members of the press and public, and gradually began to talk more about his early life in Birmingham, Alabama, 'The Magic City'. He told me about his apprenticeship with Professor John

Tuttle Whaley who had nurtured fledgling bandleaders Thelde Hill and Erskine Hawkins as well as Count Basie's great drummer Jo Jones, and spoke about pianist Avery Parham, composer of the classic 'After Hours' and the close friend of his teenage years. And he talked about some of the blues singers he'd accompanied, singing out the flamboyant and little known Dr Jo Adams who, with his matching sets of tuxedo and full tails in various colours, greatly appealed to Sunny's sense of the visually spectacular.

"I'm painting pictures of infinity with my music and that's why a lot of people can't understand it. But my music has something else in it, something from another world."

Now he'd conduct business meetings al fresco. Outside Penn Station one day in 1972 we sat together on the edge of a flowerbed with the faithful Wilkinson keeping guard — there's no other way of describing his vigilance — while Sunny related stories of the group's visit to Egypt the previous December. Going there had been a spur of the moment decision, he explained. When The Arkestra descended on Cairo, unannounced, the Minister of Culture had arranged for a performance by the Egyptian Ballet to be cancelled so that they could play. Contrary to what some Western sceptics might have imagined, the Egyptian reaction to the pianist's assumed name was one of respect. A newspaper article talked of his 'Pharaonic descent' and commented that the faces of Arkestra members had 'an Egyptian cast'. On a trip to the Pyramids they played their cassettes inside and outside the tombs, encouraged by cab drivers and their guides who felt their music 'sounded Egyptian'. He gave me copies of his newest albums *Nohorhu* and *Nature's God*, recorded in Egypt with the assistance of Hartmut Geerken, the German musicologist, composer and leading Raiphile who worked for the Goethe Institute in Cairo and at whose Helipolis house The Arkestra had given a concert.



Marshall Allen, Helipolis, 1972

As I spent more time in New York, I decided I wanted to write a book about the new jazz. While *As Serious As Your Life* began to take shape, I spoke to dozens of musicians who embraced the new black aesthetic. I found that it was virtually an article of faith for young bloods to have played with Sun Ra, however briefly. Spending time in his circle was an important training ground, even if it entailed little or no financial reward. Musicians might visit the Sun Studio daily for a period or move into the house for days or weeks at a time. Others would drop in on rehearsals, just to absorb something of the atmosphere and learn from Sun Ra's philosophy. Although he would welcome many no-hoppers into the fold, sensing a latent ability that few others could spot, those unable to stay the course were likely to earn Sunny's sarcasm and scorn. However, to have spent some time in his company was considered a mark of achievement and an important part of the procedure for becoming a "New York musician." Among those who had gone the distance in Chicago were three highly regarded bassists: Richard Davis, Richard Evans and Wibur Ware. In New York, saxophonist Pharaoh Sanders and the late guitarist Sonny Shamrock paid their dues with him. And there were many lesser known figures, such as trumpeters Ahmed Abdullah, Earl Cross and Ted Daniel, saxophonist Noah Howard and drummer Art "Sharkey" Lewis, who put in apprenticeships at the court of the mythical modern day Ellington.

Sun Ra told me how he'd first met Farell "Little Rock" Sanders, as he was still known on his arrival from California. The Arkestra were at pianist Gene Harris's Playhouse, a MacDougal Street coffeehouse, and in order to listen to them nightly, the saxophonist found a waiter's job there. Homeless at first, he spent weeks sleeping rough and in stairways until Sun Ra allowed him to join in at rehearsals, gave him a place to stay and encouraged him to "Egyptianise" (my term) his name. Sunny told me he planned to release his tapes from that period. "That should be very interesting to show the world what pre-Coltrane Pharaoh Sanders was like," he commented with a gleam in his eye.

The list of those who'd played with him was endless, so, too, were the stories — about Sunny, the German who reveled in the duality of his sun sign and used his predilection for astrological nature as an excuse for treating his sidemen with a certain ambivalence. If his generosity was well-known, then so was his meanness. When gigs were scarce and transportation costs for so large a number of bodies and equipment rapidly absorbed receipts, keeping a tight rein on the purse strings was paramount. To play the music was Sunny's number one priority, and if years living close to the edge had caused him to develop a certain parsimony, it was understandable. But tales of the struggles some went through while waiting to get paid and the ensuing after-gig shenanigans were legion in the music community. And when it came to the way he controlled his men — they would have to ask permission to go out on a date or visit family members — that some would stand for such treatment was a matter of debate in a community perpetually concerned with historical denials of manhood. Noah Howard was particularly scathing: "Sun Ra runs his band like an army," he told me. "When he says 'Stand up' they stand up. When he says 'Sit down' they sit down." He even had one of the musicians stand guard at the door all night.

"It's like anything else," Sun Ra explained. "When the army wants to build men they isolate



Ronnie Boykins, Marshall Allen, Sun Ra and Herby Griffin, Sun Studio, New York, 1966

them. It's just the case that these are musicians, but you might say they're marines. They have to know everything. In their case, knowing everything means touching on all places of music. Of course they won't get as much chance to play as other musicians, but on the other hand, they're getting more chance to play."

In an attempt to keep living costs down, he convinced The Arkestra to eat the humble turtle bean, lecturing them on its magical, nutritional powers. When he took his own turn in the kitchen, he prepared vegetarian stews with fine Southern smells. Despite the rigorous conditions he imposed, Sun Ra succeeded in building an army of men who were prepared to drop whatever they were doing at a moment's notice and rehearse for hours. Clifford Jarvis, one of the best drummers who ever played with him, saw many young men crumble in the face of the leader's demands. "He can build your hopes up and tear you down at the same time. A lot of guys wig out, you know. Some of them can't stand to be that sincere. They don't have any foundation to be that stand and stable with what Sun Ra has to offer."

While living in New York I got to know Roger Blank, another of Sunny's drummers. Roger and Carol, his painter wife, became good friends with whom I stayed on several occasions. From their sensitive analysis I learned a great deal about Sun Ra's nature and his ways of operating. Roger, whose reverberant drums can be heard on *The Magic City*, played percussion on the second ESP volume of *The Helioscope: Worlds With Sun Ra* on piano and celeste; he's also a sideman on vibraphonist Walt Dickerson's *A Patch Of Blue*. In order to praise his erstwhile leader, he paraphrased Shelley: "Musically, Sun Ra is one of the unacknowledged legislators of the world." Carol pointed out how he seemed to attract individuals who were in need of strong guidance. His she said, was essentially a nurturing role, and I began to see Sunny as being both mother and father to those in his care. There was something appropriate about this, considering that his sexuality remained undetermined. Many, myself included, subscribed to the idea that Sunny was gay, now, because it appears he had seldom expressed his sexuality in physical terms, that long-held belief seems in doubt. Biographer John Szwed has

Marshall Allen,
John Gilmore
and Danny Bank





concluded that for most of Sunny's life he was celibate, yet from what I observed and knew of him, it was clear to me that he was a homoerotic sensibility. Although he was loved by those in his immediate circle, other musicians, in moments of irreverence, sometimes referred to him as "Old Mama Ra".

In 1979 I was in Germany for the Moers Free Jazz Meeting where The Arkestra was playing. A number of older musicians were travelling in Sunny's entourage, among them Robert Barry, his first Chicago drummer, and the reunions between Arkestra members and other Chicagoans such as The Art Ensemble were a joy to witness. Sun Ra was thoroughly enjoying himself in the relaxed festival atmosphere, and agreed that I might come out to the house in Philadelphia to talk to John Gilmore. It was a long cherished ambition of mine, for I had come to regard Gilmore as one of the most profound and daring saxophonists I'd ever heard. Despite his comparative anonymity within the ranks of The Arkestra, a subjugation and denial of the artist's ego that Sun Ra encouraged, it seemed to me that Gilmore just got better and better.

So it was that I travelled to the City of Brotherly Love and made my way to \$626 Morton Street in Germantown, the final home of The Arkestra. Outside the sun was shining. The summer air rang with raucous greetings and laughter as neighbours dropped by or sat on the doorstep with Sunny and passed the time of day. But in Gilmore's room — the walls spray-painted with mystical patterns and hung with snapshots from various gigs — the atmosphere was one of total dedication to music. His saxophone lay on the bed beside him as we talked, oddly naked without its mouthpiece, a folio of guitar music was propped open on a music stand. Cupboards bulged with clothes, and books on music and spiritual matters lay everywhere. Gilmore, born in Mississippi but raised in Chicago from the age of two, spoke slowly in the deep, sonorous tones of the city's black Southside. With a gentleness of expression that belied his ferocious approach to the instrument, he told me about the time, not long after moving to New York, when he sat in with Willie Bobo's Latin ensemble at Birdland

and John Coltrane came running up from the back of the club shouting, "John Gilmore! John Gilmore! You got it, you got it — you got the concept!" After the set, he said, Coltrane insisted on having an on-the-spot lesson. Impoverished and struggling, Gilmore was reluctant at first to impart his secrets to someone who was already a success, but he reasoned that his situation as an unknown in the city left him with little option. Later Coltrane would acknowledge the source of his inspiration when he recorded his iconoclastic blues masterpiece "Chasin' The Train".

Sunny peeped into the room to assure himself that everything was under control, then went off for a catnap. On the question of discipline, his saxophonist declared, "When you look at it, it's hard, but it makes sense. It could be no other way if you want to do your best for the music. He's created a certain standard on a high level and you have to keep on rehearsing to keep that music up there. It's no good to come out with sloppy performances." Despite the continuing lack of financial reward, he felt that playing Sunny's music had made his life worthwhile. "What we've been doing is of benefit to the people. Some people listen to the music, and it helps them. It's got a lot of happiness and love in it, not sadness and gravity — Sun Ra's not about that. It's been highly rewarding."

When we'd finished talking, Gilmore excused himself and went off to the local cinema to take in a horror movie. Sun Ra permitted himself a few sarcastic comments about his favourite tenorman's pastime, then jammed a metal pyramid over one set of headphones and two layers of headgear to be photographed in yet another weird and wonderful guise — his favourite pastime. A lazy afternoon ensued: Marshal Allen, splattered in paint from a decorating foray, arrived with a brown and white spaniel and sat on the step with a pencil and scrap of paper to do 'numbers', the unofficial lottery. Then conga drummer Akkataew came by with a lady friend. She got a hint of the 'treatment', but Sunny seemed to have mellowed where all that was concerned. While the musicians enjoyed the warm weather and relative quiet of the street, we talked about matters of little consequence. On Gilmore's return, Sun Ra squeezed us into a car so that one of his trumpeters could drive me to the station. On the way he regaled us with tales of his teenage years in Birmingham and said he was still trying to play pieces Avery Parrish had taught him. We parted company, but as the train started up, I heard a shout. Sunny had signed one of his latest singles for me and left it behind. Now, puffing and panting, but imbued with the energy of a man half his age, he ran beside the track and thrust the record into my hand. "You mustn't forget this one," he smiled in the manner of a someone with "a lot of happiness and love in him, not sadness and gravity" — albeit one who knew he was making history with his every move. How could I have forgotten it? How could I forget him? □ A series of programmes on Sun Ra will be broadcast on Radio 3 during September. See Soundings for details.

**Sun Ra,
Philadelphia, 1979**

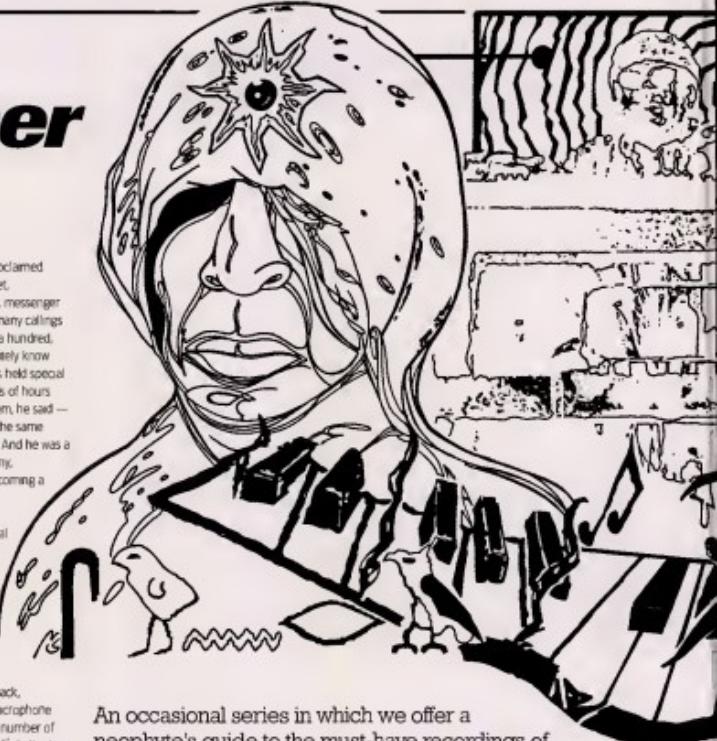


the primer

Sun Ra — philosopher, poet, self-proclaimed space alien, free jazz innovator, poet, traditionalist, prophet, cosmic joker, messenger for the Creator — had many names and many callings. But he had even more records, well over a hundred, and it is by his records that we shall ultimately know him. And this is as it should be, for records held special importance for Sun Ra. He spent hundreds of hours listening alone — the only way to hear them, he said — two people of different spots listening to the same record can cause problems for the music. And he was a pioneer in creating his own record company, controlling every aspect of production, becoming a sonic auteur.

By the time that his El Saturn Records began to appear in the 1950s, commercial record companies had already perfected a style which assured that the recording process itself would be invisible, the machinery of phonography being used as a picture window through which an illusion was created of 'being there' with the musicians. But Sun Ra consistently violated this convention by recording live at strange sites, using feedback, distortion, high delay or reverb, unusual microphone placement, abrupt fades or edits, and any number of other effects, noises or accidents which called attention to the recording process. (On some records you can hear a phone ringing, or someone walking near the microphone.) It was a rough style of production, an anti-style, which anticipated both free jazz and punk production to come, but also reflected a shrewd sense of how one could shape album-sized works out of hours of rehearsal recordings and at the same time make the studio a part of the performance.

The process by which Saturn records came into existence and were distributed was as mysterious as the rest of Sonny's life. The albums were assembled and sequenced by an obscure syntax, often mixing together recordings done on different occasions, at rehearsals and in the studio, then labelling them all with the same date, or with the wrong personnel, so that The Arkestra might appear to be playing in widely divergent styles on a single occasion; 45 rpm singles of a given composition might or might not contain the version which appeared on the LP which followed, or the same composition might turn up on different LPs with no mention that they had been issued before. Many of the records had hand-drawn covers and labels, the wrong titles or no titles at



An occasional series in which we offer a neophyte's guide to the must-have recordings of some of the names we like to drop a lot. This month, John F Szwed follows **Sun Ra** on a journey to the outer limits of sound. Illustration: Savage Pencil

all. Sometimes they were labelled as being in "Solar High Fidelity" or were registered with "Interplanetary BH". Sonny called the Saturn releases his "avant garde" records. "Whatever I think people are not going to listen to, I've always recorded it."

There was no conventional advertising for El Saturn Records, no promotional copies for review, and no distribution channels except mail order, hand delivery to a few record shops, and sales from the bandstand after performances. Orders sent to the El Saturn address might or might not get a response, and when a record came it might be a different one than ordered. For years it was only possible to locate Sun Ra's recordings by synchronicity, acts of God, or with the help of those wired into the record underground. Only recently have the Vaults of Saturn finally begun to open to us.

Sun Ra: The Singles (Evidence ECD 22164 2CD)

The singles are among the rarest of the Sun Ra oeuvre, ranging from his mid-50s doo-wop experiments to boogie R&B (such as singer Yochammar's "The Sun One") — a boasting riff tune with cosmological overtones, wherein the Sun King emerges as a mack man — and "Message To Earthman", a short account of an alien invasion set against swinging horns), there are alternate takes from Saturn LPs, chanted poems like "The Bridge" and some 1962 parlour piano. Since The Singles is organized chronologically this would seem to be the place for the beginner to start, but the total of Sun Ra's music follows no easy progression, and many later recordings sound as if they should be the earliest.



This set purports to contain all known Sun Ra singles with Sun Ra (some of which exist in only one copy), but who can be sure?

Sun Song (Delmark DD-411 CD)

This, the first Sun Ra LP (originally titled *Jazz By Sun Ra* on Transition Records), was recorded in Chicago by the legendary African-American producer Tom Wilson, who in 1956 was busy organizing the first recordings of Cecil Taylor, John Coltrane and Sun Ra as leaders, and later went on to produce Frank Zappa, Nico, The Velvet Underground, and Bob Dylan's first electric group. Though nothing here is especially startling, Sun Song gives us a hint of what earlier Ra groups must have sounded like, especially Ellingtonian pieces like "New Horizons", the theme song for Ra's first Chicago big band, and "Fall Off The Log" in turn recalls a chorus-line dance step from his days as pianist with Fletcher Henderson's group at the Club Delusa. But other

compositions offer subtle clues of things to come: "Possession", for instance, a waltz written by London composer Harry Revel for *Perfume Set To Music*, a suite of tunes originally arranged and recorded by Les Baxter with lush string writing, harp, oboe, theremin and Novachord organ. Though Sun Ra's version is straightforward, the choice itself tells us something about his listening habits at the time and his vision of the future.

Super-Sonic Jazz (Evidence EDS 22015 CD)

The first LP on Sun Ra, Sun Ra's own label. This 1956 recording included "India" and the two-part "Sundology", segments of a larger unrecorded work called "Sundology (A Suite Of Philosophical Sounds)". "India" was built on a single chord, and was laden with percussion; "Sundology" was rightly described by Sonny as "a different kind of blues". Chicago was a source of inspiration for many compositions here, as some of the

tunes reflect, though the connection was never simple. "El Is The Sound Of Joy", for instance, honours the Canaanite God, but also signifies on Fletcher Henderson's 1934 recording, "Hotter Than Hell", as being a praise song for the elevated trains which connect all of Chicago and ran past Sun Ra's apartment. This was part of a "Chicago Suite", which also included "Springtime In Chicago" and "Street Named Hell". On "Springtime" Sonny plays a piano so out of tune it sounds "prepared", altered for percussive effects. And the electronic delay used on this cut was so extreme that it reverberates like a King Tubby dub.

Most of these pieces have some family resemblance to the music of the era — clipped post-bop touches, funk gestures, Latin affections. But acoustic and electric piano alternating within the same solo, the presence of an electric bass, otherwise evocative melodies decorated by unexpected accents and intervals, swing rhythms punched up with heavy timpani accents — none of these quite fit the profiles of either swing or bebop, and manage to make both styles seem slightly strange.

Sound Of Joy

(Delmark 414 CD)

What in 1956 was supposed to be *Jazz By Sun Ra Vol 2* on Transition, did not appear until 1968 when Delmark issued it as *Sound Of Joy*. Now with two baritone saxophones and bass and timpani in the group, "Two Tones", "Ankin", and "Reflections In Blue" have an enormous bottom sound. "Overtones Of China" extends the orientalism of some earlier jazz with gongs and wood blocks, asymmetrical themes and the feel of shifting time, and two pieces ("Parades" and "Planet Earth") are given idiosyncratic Latin rhythms. Running through all of them are unusually-conceived background riffs, multi-thematic melodies (each having different rhythms and different keys), timpani solos, and surprising counter melodies.

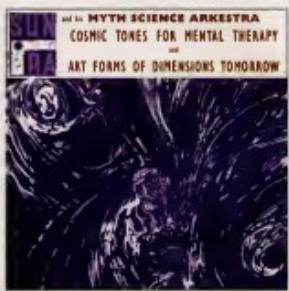
Though this sequence of tunes approximates what Sun Ra was playing at clubs, it must have seemed unusual music at the time, evoking its sources, but never surrendering to them. It was music which could drift past without notice, which could even be danced to, but nonetheless was uneasy listening. Nothing was quite what it seemed.

Jazz In Silhouette

(Evidence ECD 22012 CD)

Silhouette from 1958 was a major statement by The Arkestra, helped by the addition of Hobart Dotson, an exceptional trumpet player who later worked with Lionel Hampton and Charles Mingus. Dotson's composition "Enlightenment", the first of the Arkestra's "space marches", became a mighty staple for the next 36 years, a vehicle on which the whole group stood or marched or sang in unison. It loped along like some

cartoon animal theme, but quickly transformed itself by turns into a hard bop anthem and a rhapsodic theme cut by cha-cha, march and 4/4 swing rhythms, all of it accomplished without the melody repeating itself. "Ancient Aethope" calls up the spirit of Blanton's programmatic "African" themes like "Pyramid" or "Heneek". But what The Arkestra achieved on this piece was unprecedented in jazz (though Ra's Boiles might be claimed as a distant relative) by means of the simplest of structures (a single chord and a crisp but subtly shifting Latin tinge rhythm). The Arkestra is set free from the conventions of the pop song and its grip on the swing era, but also liberated from the harmonic residue of the same songs left over from the beboppers' appropriation. Once the ensemble states the melody, two flutes improvise collectively; a poised Dorion solo takes full advantage of the harmonic freedom which in a few years would be called modality. Sun Ra plays with the bass tones of the piano ringing out rhythmically against the drums, musicians blow through mouthpieces without their horns, and two singers intone words so softly and independently that their parts cancel each other out. But improvised and open as "Aethope" is, there is an inescapable sense of direction, a destiny, about the piece. And as with all of Sun Ra's work, pieces as prophetic as these coexist on the same record with slightly coarser two-beat compositions like "Hours Aher". The cover proclaims that "This is the sound of silhouettes, images and forecasts of tomorrow disguised as jazz", and who could deny it?



Cosmic Tones For Mental Therapy/Art Forms Of Dimensions Tomorrow
(Evidence ECD 2.2037 CD)

With The Arkestra now located in New York City, and recording everything they played at rehearsals (they had few public appearances for several years), *Cosmic Tones* was recorded in 1963. "And Otherness" is a small group study of the lower tones -- bass, bass clarinet, bass trombone, baritone sax, the chamber-like quality of the piece bolstered by bassist Romeo

Boykin's rich bowed passages. On "Ithiner And You", oboe, bowed bass and drums are overwhelmed by such reverberation that it now seems to anticipate psychedelia two years before the fact. Other pieces on this record were recorded live at ten in the morning at the Tip Top Club in Brooklyn when it was possible to borrow their Hammond B-3, the organ of choice in the 60s, but instead of using it for obvious funk purposes, Sun Ra employed it for its tonal colours.

Art Forms Of Dimensions Tomorrow was recorded earlier, in 1961-62. "Cluster Of Galaxies" and "Solar Drums" are early experiments with studio sound, rhythm section exercises with such strange reverberations that the instruments' identities begin to disappear and turn the music into low budget muzak/concrete. On "The Outer Heavens" Sun Ra used no rhythm section at all, just a chamber group of Ra's band/band a quartet of reeds and a trumpet, each player developing his own lines with relative independence. But "Infinity Of The Universe" is nearly all rhythm section, built around a centre established by a repeated number figure deep in the bass of the piano, with trumpet and bass clarinet joining only at the end. From the very first, then, the New York Saturn recordings suggested that every record would be idiosyncratic, as if they had been made by different groups.

When Sun Comes Out

(Evidence ECD 2.2068 CD)

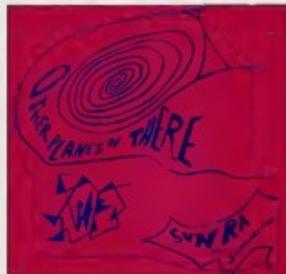
A rehearsal recording from 1962-63, *When Sun Comes Out* appeared in blank or handwritten covers. There were still backward-looking atmospheric flute solos and bolero-like drums, and "Circle" had a wobbly vocal which suggested the Duke Ellington of "Creole Love Song". But innovations were everywhere else on the record: three years after the first version, a new treatment of "We Travel The Spaceways" shows Sun Ra's piano becoming increasingly atonal, suddenly erupting into double-double time figures on "Calling Planet Earth". Rat Patnick tests the physical limits of the baritone saxophone and strays freely from Sun Ra's persistent mining of a single tonal centre on the piano. And behind most of the pieces, breaking up the beat, unsettling the expected groove, is Clarendon Jarvis, the most tempestuous and sophisticated drummer that Sun Ra would ever have.

Other Planes Of There

(Evidence ECD 2.2069 CD)

In 1964 Sun Ra shifted his methods once again. The title piece is a major work, and a departure from everything he had done before. At 22 minutes, it took up a whole side of an LP, and was one of the longest pieces ever recorded by a jazz group at the time. Despite being collectively improvised, it is astonishingly coherent and organic: there are 12 instruments, though very few play at the same time; soloists appear and disappear quickly, a trombone that seems to rise from nowhere and lay a foundation for the other horns

to enter, at times the piece threatens to become conventionally rhythmic in a jazz sense, but never yields to the temptation, and the drums continue to play textually, and almost melodically. Sun Ra's piano weaves through it all, linking the parts together, until at the end they all rise inevitably together.



The Magic City

(Evidence ECD 2.2069 CD)

The Magic City, a direct reference to Sun Ra's "home town" Birmingham, Alabama, was collectively improvised in 1965 and lacks a fixed theme as such, though individual statements and isolated notes flow together to form an incremental melody. Like many of his compositions from this period, it was sketched out with only a rough sequence of solos and a mutual understanding which came from greeting daily rehearsals. Sun Ra gave it order by pointing to players, by signalling with numbers which referred to prepared themes and effects, and by hand gestures to direct the musicians on what to play — what composer Butch Morris would later call "conduction".

Sun Ra simultaneously plays piano and Selmer Clavoline, usually in conjunction with Ronnie Boykin's bowed bass, but also at times with Roger Binks' reverberated drums, Robert Cummings's bass clarinet, or

Marshall Allen's piccolo. It ebbs and flows, with duos and trios appearing and disappearing, yet always returning to Ra's quietly grating keyboards and Boykin's singing bassines. Almost three-quarters of the way through, saxophones begin to enter in various configurations, followed by a sudden ensemble cry, and a quiet return to Ra and Boykin. There had been other grand attempts at collective improvisation — Ornette Coleman's earlier Free Jazz and John Coltrane's contemporaneous Ascension — but none had the seamless quality of *The Magic City*, nor its secret formalism (if anything, *Magic City* is closer to Karlheinz Stockhausen's completely annotated *Zemessza*). It was never played again after 1965, saxophonist John Gilmore said, because it was "unreproducible, a tapestry of sound."

The Heliocentric Worlds Of Sun Ra Vol I

(ESP 1014 CD)

Heliocentric was the second in a series of extraordinary recordings made in 1965. The title piece, like all of the works on Ra's mid-60s albums, builds its melody cumulatively, additively, through collective improvisation. Some might claim that "Heliocentric" lacks a melody, but they would surely recognise its motives, like the staggered entry of three trombones (which oddly suggests the "Kane" motive at the opening of *Citizen Kane*), a figure which also occurs in "Outer Nothingness" and "Of Heavenly Things." Melody or no, Sun Ra maintains interest by contrast of register and texture, piccolo against bass, timpani, trombones and bass marimba. "Outer Nothingness" follows a similar pattern, and might even be another take of "Heliocentric." "Other Worlds" pits Sun Ra's furiously atonal piano (sometimes played simultaneously with celeste) against the rest of The Arkestra.



Nothing Is

(ESP 7045 CD)

In May of 1966 The Arkestra went on a one-week tour of New York State colleges sponsored by the ESP

label's Esperanto Foundation, and *Nothing Is* offers a glimpse of The Arkestra live on the road, suggesting that they were attempting to do as much as possible within a limited time on stage. Sun Ra can be heard cuing the group to what composition is coming next, moving from abstract piano openings to recognizable melodies, and compressing both "Imagination" and "Rocket Number Nine" into one minute and 44 seconds. It also shows that The Arkestra could improvise collectively live, even under the pressure of time.



Atlantis

(Evidence ECD 22067 CD)

Recorded at Nigerian drummer Olutunji's cultural centre in New York City in 1967, "Atlantis" is a 21-minute epic, with Sun Ra on the Gibson organ (a Farfisa knockoff) and the Clavoline, beginning ominously with sonar beeps from the organ; then, as it develops, he rolls his hands on the keys, presses his forearm along the keyboard, plays with his hands upside down, spinning with arms windmilling the keys — a virtual sonic representation of the flooding of Atlantis, a great smear of a solo, Sun Ra's *Toccata And Fugue*.

Sunrise In Different Dimensions

(Art Art 6009 CD)

Mayan Temples

(Black Sant 1.20121 CD)

Two of the more interesting of the later Arkestra recordings (many others are shoddily produced slap-dash affairs) *Sunrise* captures most of a 1980 concert from Willisau, full of solo piano, some truly unusual versions of standards like "Tea For Two" or "Round Midnight," Charlie Parker tunes, and a sheet of swing band hits.

Mayan Temples from 1990 revisits some of the 1950s material, especially the exotic, and some 30s- and 40s pop tunes. A bit of a jolt to those who thrive on the magisterial improvisations of the 60s and 70s, but a fair representation of the range of musics which could be heard from the group in the later years.

Out There A Minute

(Blast First BFFP 042 CD/MC)

Cosmic Visions

(Blast First BFFP 101 CD/VHS VIDEO)

Out There A Minute is a good first-stop anthology selected by Sun Ra himself, and in the Sunra tradition, it mixes together pieces recorded at seven different sessions between 1961 and 1970. Also in the Sunra tradition, there is no annotation, personnel or recording details, but nonetheless the compilation samples from otherwise unavailable records like *The Night Of The Purple Moon*, *Continuation*, and the very rare *When Angels Speak Of Love*.

Cosmic Visions is a box set containing a CD single of Sun Ra reciting the poem "I Am The Instrument", short samples of Ra's writings and poetry, and, more crucially, a video featuring Phil Niblock's experimental short *Magic Sun*, which was filmed at The Arkestra's mid-60s New York house, and the extraordinary 1972 film *Space Is The Place*, in which Ra stars in what is perhaps the world's only Biblical sci-fi exploitation phantasy.



These choices are only a start. What's still missing from the reissues are crucial mid-period Ra masterworks. The serious listener should go to any lengths to hear Sunra releases such as the 1966 *Strange Strings*, on which the Arkestra plays exotic stringed instruments that they did not know how to tune, much less play, with spectacular results; the 1970 *My Brother The Wind* with two min-hoops paired-up for sounds never heard before or since; *Out Beyond The Kingdom Of* from 1974, where Ra's incredible free piano concerto "Discipline '99" coexists with full-tilt swing tunes like "How Am I To Know?", and *Longevity* (Philly Jazz, 1978), disco-inspired, but nonetheless subliminally cosmic music. □ Evidence, hat Art and Black Sant releases are distributed by Harmonia Mundi. Denmark by Topic, ESP by ZYX, and Blast First by RMT. John F. Szwed's book *Space Is The Place: The Lives And Times Of Sun Ra* is published this month by Payback Press, and is reviewed on page 76.

charts

Playlists from the outer limits of planet sound

Other Music 15

- Group Onigaku** — Music Of Group Onigaku (Hear Sound Art Library)
Spectrum — Forever Alien (Space Age)
Brightte Fontaine/Areski — Virus Et Nous (Saravah)
Various — Music From The Tomb Of The Cybermen (Ma Satelite)
Achim Reichel — ARB (Germanophon)
Legendary Pink Bots — Hallway Of The Gods (Solefmoon)
Sun City Girls — Live In Japan (Japan Overseas)
Miles Davis — In Concert: Live At Philharmonic Hall (Sony/Columbia)
Gyatees — 11 (Gatan Trip)
Conrad Schmitz — Rot (Plete Lunct)
L'Yong — The Way Out (Alcohol)
Village Of Savoonga — Philipp Schatz (Communication)
Steve Lacy — Strataz (Champs)
Current 93/Nurse With Wound/Christoph Heemann — In A Foreign Town (Durtra)
Roger Doyle — Babel Project Vol. 2 (Silverdor)
Compiled by Jeff Gibson, Other Music, 15 East 4th Street, New York, NY 10003, USA

Organised Sound 10

- House On Mars** — Autobitacker (Too Pure)
Liquid Liquid — Liquid Liquid (Mto Wax)
Lowfish/Solvent — Split EP (Suzon)
Various — Silverstation (Soup Deck)
Graham — EP (Output)
Various — Smoulder (Silent)
Coldcut — Let Us Play (Nina Tune)
To Rococo Rot — Paris 25 (City Sleng)
David Kristian — National Kid/Dystopoint (Discreet)
Kandis — Vel Vok (Karoke Kalk)
Compiled by Linus Booth, Organised Sound Records, Montreal

A Difficult List

- Morton Feldman** — Piano & String Quartet (Nonesuch)
LeMonte Young — The Second Dream Of The High Tension Line Stepdown Transformer/Theatre Of Eternal Music (Gramavision)
Erik Satie — Vexations (Decal)
Charlemagne Palestine — Strumming Music (New Tone)
Steve Reich — Drumming (Deutsche Grammophon)
Iannis Xenakis — Pleiades (Harmonia Mundi)
Skozezy Fetisch — Momma Key (Silent)

- Machine For Making Sense** — On Second Thoughts (Tall Poppies)

Paul Schütze — Deus Ex Machina (Extreme)

- Terry Riley** — In C (25th Anniversary Performance) (New Albion)
Hands To — Nazha (Menafid)

Warren Burt — 39 Dissonant Etudes (Tall Poppies)

John Cage — Five Stone Wind (Noel)

Jonathan Harvey — Bhaka (NMC)

Fetisch Park — Traz (Extreme)

Compiled by Bryce Moors, Difficult Listening, RTRFM, Perth, Western Australia, Sundays 9-7pm
(<http://www.hyperion.net.au/diffic>)

Nova Express 14

- Coldcut** — Let Us Play (Nina Tune)
Pop.Low.Res — Error Log (white)
Arthur Russell — World Of Echo (Upside)
Juryman Vs Spacer — Mai Order Justice (SSR)
Luke Vibert — Big Soup (M'D Wax)
p-Ziq — Lunatic Harness (Hut)
Buckhunk 3000 — In Is In (Language)
The Beatles — Stone Gray (Relativity)
The Tarantulas — The Peloso Grove (Internal Bass)
Max 404 — Before And After (Universal Language)
Cut And Paste — Do That Turtle (Freshman)
Reflection — The Enormous World (Clear)
Alice Coltrane — Journey In Satchidananda (Impulse)
Jason Branton — Relativity (Sirkus)
Compiled by Hippheus, Radio Nova, Paris & Campus, Brussels

The Office Ambience

- Toru Takemitsu** — The Film Music Of (Nonesuch)
Jim O'Rourke — Bad Timing (Drag City)
Elixir — The Photos Incident (Language)
Cosmic Invention — Help Your Satan Mind (The Now Sound)
Various — Spunk Jazz (II)
Terre Thoenitz — GIRL (Comatorse)
Various — For Films Edit 2 (Freibank/PIAS)
Coldcut — Let Us Play (Nina Tune)
Bertolt Brecht — Mack The Knife (Sony Classical)
Z-Rock — Hawa (Pop Guitars)
Autechre — Ochi Suite EP (Warp)
The Amazing Band — Roar (PMR)
Asteroid Desert Songs — Till Your Dog Come To Be (Feed (Creativeman Disc))
Photek — Modus Operandi (Science)
Maurizio — Maurizio (PI)
Compiled by The Wire Sound System

Toru Takemitsu

Up to the mark: September's selected records

sound check



Right on brother: Archie Shepp reviewed page 61

PHOTO: STEPHEN BARBER

Fred Anderson/DKV Trio

Fred Anderson/DKV Trio
DKVMSK 001 126 161 CD

Muhal Richard Abrams

Song For All
BUCK 5MMT 126 161 CD

Two albums by founder members of the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians. Fred Anderson provides a stirring example of AACM's concept. Spontaneous and sincere, the music is allowed to go anywhere it wants, garrulous, out-throated jazz with a touching sense of back porch intimacy. Play the closing blues a little unambitious, but Anderson's compositions — "Planet", "Aaron's Tunes", "Dark Day" — have a trompe l'oeil complexity worthy of Braxton. Drummer and basses are terrific (though unnamed). The presence of an extra road player — presumably producer Ken Vandermark — creates some confusion about who is playing what. I'd guess that Anderson is the less exhibitionist, more harmonically intriguing solo player.

Over the last two decades Muhal Richard

Abrams has accumulated a staggering list of saxes at Black Saint. His music is organised with such impudent clarity that those who only find jazz radicalism in abstruse chaos will fail to register its virtues. Abrams's prismatic analysis of timbre and his alert rhythmic ear — as much in debt to Stravinsky as to Charlie Parker — project his seven piece into intricate gearing acrobatics. In drummer League Nicholas, he has found a genius of pulse and cool, Eddie Allen (trumpet) and Aaron Stewart (sax) have their own voices, but are nonetheless committed to the decorative inventiveness of the music. Trombonist Craig Harris's expressive scurries manage to fit right in too. On "Marching With Honor", bassist Brad Jones riffs so hip and propulsive you can imagine Prince listening in for ideas. On vibes, Bryan Carter indulges the instrument's capacity for cheek and sizzle, but chores out sebastion abstractus, too.

Abrams's secret weapon is the synthesizer. His programming suggests a 60s lab technician who has just discovered lime rights and marigolds and purple shirts and decided to rock out, man! The synth-only finale — "Imagine" — is a blueprint for an Abrams

arrangement. Realised with the synth's incongruous plops and whooshes, it suggests a cross between electronic Kraftwerk and synclavier Zappa. Well bizarre.

That music this specio — this crazy inventive, this oddly strange — is curiously confined to a ghetto called jazz is criminal. Muhal Abrams is not simply an inheritor of the legacy of Duke Ellington, he deserves the attention of anyone who ever loved Henry Cow. Black dada nihilism's not dead, it's being recorded by Jon Riesenberg on Lower East Side.

BRIAN WATSON

Aphasia

Stereotopycism.
KOMPLASTICS INTRODUCTORY PAPERBACKS 15P
01 CO

Les Sculpteurs De Vinyl

Memory And Money
STUPRIS & TROMPETTE ST 1012 CD

Stockhausen versus the Technocrats (The Wire 141) made dispiriting reading.

Reviewed this month:

- Muhal Richard Abrams** Fred Anderson **Aphasia** Aube
Baby Mammoth Berger-Hodge/Moutard/Rutt
Paul Bley Don Cherry
Coldcut Crescent Andrew
Cyrille Elton Dean Deviants
Thomas Dimuzio Dissolve
Paul Dunmall Phil Durrant
Etage 34 Mahmoud Fadil
Farmers Manual Fennesz
Susanna Ferrar Fila Brazilia
Flux Fong Naam Fred Frith
Soliman Gamil Goem
Grateful Dead Keith Jarrett
Kraut Land Bill Laswell/
Material Love Cry Want
Macromassia Wynton Marsalis
Maurizio Medeski Martin & Wood Merzbow/
Gore Beyond Necropsy
Montage Movietone Dominic
Muidowney David Murray
μ-Ziq Ø + Note Orchestre
Murphy Paul Patterson
Philosopher's Stone Poetics
Potuzak Les Sculpteurs De Vinyl
Vinyl Archie Shepp
Silverization2 Silverstone
Sokante Etages Solarus
Southern Journey Spunk Jazz
Squarepusher Sun Ra
Tarwater Tosca Unknown
Deutschland Vanquish
Vienna Art Orchestra L'Voag
John Wall Wu Man Iannis
Xenakis Yurag

Coldcut

Let Us Play

NINJA TUNE/SONG 3CD • £14.99

Coldcut

More Beats + Pieces

NINJA TUNE/SONG CDSSA 00

Coldcut's Matt Black and Jonathan More like to collage their beats in a linear snap-together way that looks back to Grandmaster Flash and Afrika Bambaataa. Seeking rigorously to the sound of Old Skool turntable sampling and its succession of quotes (right at the end of the album there's a snatch of Bill Burroughs describing his cut 'n' paste method), they collate their funky vibes along with rogue musical outtakes and spacy exclamations on a piston-like conveyor belt of breakbeats. They now work to a logic of inventive high-speed warping, as exemplified on *Let Us Play's* most dazzling track, "More Beats + Pieces (Daddy Rips It Up Mix)". Jazzy beats and guitar chops, disco breaks, DJ scratches, a snatch of early swing, the theme from *Peter And The Wolf*, and — an inspired moment — a sweeping orchestral riff over a schoolyard chant.

Let Us Play is Coldcut's first album on their own Ninja Tune label. Coming at a time when they and their media heads at Hex are positively bursting with ideas, the album has a subtly showcase feel. Apart from the usual smooth, funky odysseys, there's Takvir Singh playing solos on the opener; Salena Saliva delivers a sneering shtick about club decadence called "Noah's Toilet"; "I'm Wild About The Thing" twins organic gaps with 50s sex education and a raunchy, poppy chorus; Jello Biafra of The Dead Kennedys delivers an anti-capitalist polemic over tiny Electro-pop beats on "Every Home A Prison"; and the haunting "Panopon" samples soundbytes from 90s protests movements against a mournful, rippling Techno-style cello.

As if that wasn't enough ideas, the album comes with a CD-ROM complete with Ninja Tune quiz, video clips, a DIY remix-your-own Coldcut kit, and Her's Playtime program for generating new beats (used to create the Jello Biafra track).

Coldcut see *Let Us Play* as their most important album, charting the "impact of technology on a changing society". However, overdetermined with excited connections as it is,



the messages get a bit confused on the way — not least in their championing of technological gizmos on the CD-ROM but while their music samples the sobs of anti-modernity protests, or in the way flashwords of violence and the bomb! are laced into the music to spike the beat and crank up the fun rhythms. *Let Us Play's* ultimate protest is, "Money I've got rhythm I haven't used yet", but their snappy, streetwise approach to cultural intervention seems preferable to stale bedroom irony or dystopian soundbytes lifted from sci-Fi B-movies.

The *More Beats + Pieces EP* of remixes covers different ground, in addition to Coldcut's blazing "Daddy Rips It Up Mix", Torbøsle John McEntee pulls a gliding Rare Grooves meets Easy Listening track out of the bag. T-Power's take has a dry pumping drum 'n' bass energy that swoons into moments of dreamy drift. And there's a great series of scratch workouts from Kid Koala, Q-Bert, and a winning six turntable cut-and-thrust jam between Strictly Kev, Ollie Trebla and Kid Koala, broken up every step of the way with choss and chips of beat associations flying off the needles.

MATT FIFTYCHE

Stockhausen refused to be impressed by Aphex Twin, Platraman, Scanner and Daniel Pemberton, but it was equally disappointing that the younger sound artists could find little to appreciate in his work. Ultimately, my sympathies were with Stockhausen. If you helped cut the first paths into unknown territory with a pair of nail scissors, it must be a mite galling to see the tom-tom go down and every technician speed by in their 4x4s.

Stockhausen and his modernist cronies were honest enough to jetison history. Too many postmodern connoisseurs refuse to acknowledge history but are happy to plunder or repeat it and profess originality. I'm making a general point, you understand, not leveling accusations. I've no idea where Aphex and Les Sculpteurs stand on Stockhausen. Pierre Schaeffer or Spike Jones (or whether reminiscences of pieces like Aymeric Karsseff, Telemusik or Cage's Williams Mix are deliberate, canines or entirely coincidental) but I will insist that this is World Music as pioneered by Stockhausen vide Les Sculpteurs ("The United Nation") (a salute to Pluramont?) and Aphex's sphinxing of sounds from ether and environment.

Memory And Money celebrates the visceral virtues of vinyl, the smack of the platter, the bite of the stylus, the scratch and heft of the groove, the rumble of the motor. Between the syncopated clicks of the run in and run out, a raft of DJs intermingle the output from several turntables, samplers and guests, heaping salvage from the ocean of recorded sound on layers of street noise. Plenty of i-Spy points to be had as scraps from discs ancient and modern are welded past. The 12-barely-structured collage are prefigurative fun, predicated on the principle that more is never enough, and they're none the worse for that.

Silvessonsk is more introverted, more carefully wrought, but casts the net even wider, taking in sources from synthesizers to hi-tech barbed wire and rotten timber via public spaces and the short waves of the world. Aphex (aka Richard Johnson) deals in development and ambience in contrast to Les Sculpteurs' changes and events, though Johnson can startle and surprise, too. Les

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Berger/Hodge/Moufang/ Raif

Congoint

1990 EMARIS CD

Potuznik

Amore Motore (Autobahn)

1990 MEGOT I CD

Conjunto is a special project convened by David Hodge (aka Movie D, Deep Space Network) for his Heidelberg based K*2D label. A squad of electronic and jazz musicians including Karl Berger (vibraphone), Gunter "Rut" Krauss (guitar), and Moufang and Jamie Hodge on a variety of synths, software, organs, guitars, bass, congas and mallets configure themselves to produce a record that sounds like The Modern Jazz Quartet scoring a soundtrack for lousy interplanetary travel. "The Catch", the long-form, exploratory opening track, cuts in apparently in mid-jam, but soon develops into one of the dossed approximations of Miles Davis's *A Star! May I ever hear head*. As on the latter's "Shhhh/Pearl", the music stretches its muscles like a recently formed lymph testing and flexing its new tissue. Over the ensuing eight numbers, the ensemble turns out a cohesive set of impressions that fully satisfy the promises of live and electronic fusions that gather around about every few months. "New Sene" tosses Wes Montgomery's "puffy" guitar sound over the menacing advance of a Dark Magus drum loop, on "Fee Dum", the confection of swingtime drum programming and lugubrious vibes makes for a heady, oxygen enriched atmosphere. A rare example of a record drawing on jazz and Electronica but taking both genres in an unforeseen direction.

Gerhard Potuznik began life as a saxophonist in the wild stretches of Vienna's jazz/improv byways. Now, through the kind of diverting twist of fate that seems part and parcel of Austrian creativeness, he's leached up as the first man of the Cheap Bluff's galloping buccaneering Electro-jazzines. Amore Motore... his first solo album, arrives on Mego. With the exception of "Autostausch", which opens the record with a sucking, drooling hum to clear the air, most of the tracks are based around straight ahead, speeding analogue beatbox rhythms and the treated sounds of a family organ. Damping down the energetic intensity of his parallel Mouse project, Potuznik opts for a machine-led excursion along the roads already travelled by Kraftwerk and Herbie Hancock, but unlike most experiences on today's highways, you travel quite a distance without being heavily taxed.

ROB YOUNG

Crescent

Electronic Sound Constructors
SNAPSHOT CUC 001 CD

Movietone

Day And Night

POWDER WHEELS CD

Two sprouts from Brazil's fertile soil. Both these records exhibit the dark, twitchy inwardness we've come to expect from that city's music, though they pursue it in very different ways. Movietone's latest album, laden with nature and season titles ('Blank Like Snow', 'Summer', 'Sun Drawing'), specialises in understated ballads that stay just the safe side of languid. They're whispered by vocalist Kate Wright in a voice that been immuring traces of Nico, Sandy Denier and Tracey Thorn. Yet she sounds more exhorted than weary, than ever did, loo weary, even to project above the music, leaving the lyrics a blur of indistinct sounds in the general mood of contemplative endosked negot.

When it works, as on "Useless Landscape", the effect is impressive, as quasi-Latin percussion and a high, ringing guitar (also Wright's) add range, drama and texture. When it doesn't, as on "Nocche Morri", it amounts to little more than wastful introspection. The most exhilarating 90 seconds on the record come at the beginning of "Summer", where pianissimo piano notes compete with a swelling drone of guitar feedback. Momentarily it's an inspired wiz of Site being shoulder-charged by The Jesus And Mary Chain, but thereafter it loses back into fowled melancholia. Fundamentally, Movietone have 90s beatbox music, post-Tinny Cat Slivers for sensitive English types.

Percussionist Matt Jones is the most consistently creative presence in Movietone, but his solo album under the name Crescent is slight. It's wannabe Aphex Twin with a side order of Eno — its standard track "Abstract Forms" sounds like an outtake from Another Green World — a set of doodles that never find satisfactory shape. A neodyc organ loses itself in dub phasing. Sampled birds and zedded sax play tag in a derelict nightclub. Sampled journey-into-sound voices drop in and out of the mix. There's some promising raw material here, but Jones will have done better to refine it before putting out this intermittently cheering sketchbook.

ANDY MEDNARSTI

Andrew Cyrille Quintet Ode To The Living Tree

INTERCO 02225 CD

Drummer Andrew Cyrille was well prepared for the free jazz explosion of the 60s. Held variously renowned for the singer and pianist Nelle Lutter, Texas senior Illinois Jacquet and Coleman Hawkins. His tenure with Cecil Taylor from 1965-75 established him as a leading exponent of free-time percussion. He recorded one of the few intonable drum records — *What About?* — for the BYG label

in 1969. Ode To The Living Tree was recorded in Dakar last year and fulfils a long-held ambition to visit Africa.

It begins well with a duet between Cyrille and Senegalese percussionist Mor Thior. The latter's brittle finger-taps recall the Tension music of 70s film (a little reflection shows this connection is not fortuitous). Sharp and Across 710th Street attest to the threat to bourgeois complacency represented by Afro consciousness! To each alerted by this invocation, the quintet's 19 minute "A Love Supreme" sounds less like jazz than a psychiatric drum symphony; with Fred Hopkins's gorgeous bass cast as an especially serene drum. Cyrille's command of timbre has rarely sounded better, rather than a drum solo his showcase is an orchestral bouquet. Almost Every Lake whoops up a keening storm. David Murray's bass clarinet sings a sweet lament joined with Dophisque's jive quirks and his own climactic disdain. Adelphi Steve Colson's electric piano is exemplary, iridescent clusters evade the tempered snapdrag (a reminder that fusion was sometimes about advanced tone colour!) His solo, a cursive working through of the chords of Coltrane's tune, brings home the dialectical dissolution of the jazz process, by avoiding harmonic security, instead, it allows vocalised character and spontaneity to speak.

Thereafter, things are pleasant rather than great. "In PC" (included, like the other Coltrane track, at the producer's request) is perfunctory, its bop thickness less suited to the quintet's lofty freedoms. The title track sounds like a David Murray Outer Number without the all important ensemble panache. Murray's own "Dakar Danishes" and Colson's "Morning Sunbird" are throwaway excitements.

Although the visit to Senegal was evidently an emotional trip for these artists, it produced a relaxed view: the results don't compare to their best New York work. As usual, Murray's full-pelt emotionalism perches up even the dullest of ballads, but only "A Love Supreme" has the pitch of collective invention we look for from these guardians of the flame.

BEN WATSON

Elton Dean Quartet + Roswell Rudd

Rumours Of An Incident

SLAM CD 0225 CD

Elton Dean/Paul Dunnmall/Tony Levin/Paul Rogers/Roswell Rudd/Keith Tippett

Bladask
CONFIRM RUMI 92 CD

Paul Dunnmall Octet

Desire And Liberation

SLAM CD 0225 CD

Rumours Of An Incident features the acclaimed US trombonist Roswell Rudd with



PIZZICATO 5
HAPPY END OF THE WORLD
OLE 198



HELUM
THE MAGIC CITY
OLE 195



MECCA NORMAL
WHO SHOT ELVIS?
OLE 245



BARBARA MANNING
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Features Joey Burns
& John Cowertown
OLE 221



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Fred Frith Guitar Quartet

Aya o Moses

N FRANCE'S MAGNETIQUE AMOST CD

Laxval

Survival

N/WAVES/CD

Formed seven years ago, the Fred Frith quartet finally releases its first CD. The music within is a dazzling display of... well, virtually everything that electric guitars can produce in the right hands. The pieces run the gamut, from clear strumming and delicate melody through blocks of atonal noise and all points in between. The electric guitar was originally, and will always essentially be a rock instrument — at least to these ears — and there's something of the spirit of rock 'n' roll in this chamber ensemble playing, certainly in its energy and hands-on and amped-up visceral power.

Although ostensibly his group, Frith's quartet isn't merely a platform for his ego. The other members, René Lusser (who also played in Les Quatre Guitars De L'Apocalypse Band), Nick Didkovsky and Mark Stewart, each chip in a piece.

The tracks range from strict composition to spontaneous exclamations. The delicate oriental-style unison passages in Viviers' "Pulau Dewata" are intermittently broken up by slabs of feral power. The group composition "The Sandy Bay Sure" throws up huge blocks of noise which sandwich insect scratches and single bent notes. Here, Frith's three guitars strummed brittle chord in sixteenths is laid over what sounds like the three other guitars being dismantled. The hour or so of music is staggering.

The three guitar frontline of Laxval — the line-up is completed by bass, drums and two saxophones — might lack the subtlety and inventiveness of the Frith Quartet, but they're capable of producing dense, shifting rock riffs. Their instruments are big and blocklike and four-square, especially the thunderous "Madagascar". There are a mere three pulsars featured on the self-titled album, with bass, drums and two saxophones.

Though the guitars sometimes recall the thrill of Sonic Youth and Frith's old group Massacre, the ponderous



Fred Frith

The Elton Dean Quartet et al spirted, if somewhat traditional sounding, free jazz gig in North London, 'traditional sounding', that is, unless one subscribes to Simon Fell's interesting view that a conservative improv audience (and, by extension, a conservative improvised music) is one that is inherently unsympathetic to any performance involving tunes.

While maintaining the right to play melodically (funnily), the line-up on the studio recording *Blosser* sets out on a more ambitious and uplifting journey that ditchs the restrictive practices of traditional frontline and supporting instrumental roles.

"Forsonner" awakens like a dawn chorus, with a child's musical box, Rogers' pizzicato, Lurier's cymbals and snare, and pianist Toppert's eerie vocal warbling setting the scene. The latter is the most inspirational personality here, unfafid to strike out and shake up the general scheme and shape of things, to invoke unexpected moods (jarring percussive repetitions, percussive urgency, a slow blues, etc) sometimes with a Jewish streak of humor. A great among improv pianists, the range of his recorded collaborators has sadly diminished over the years.

Toppert, Rogers and Lurier also appear in Paul Dunmall's octet alongside Simon Picard, Gefrin Luddington, Anna Weishead and Chris Bridges. Dunmall's starting point for his part-notated, partly-improvised *Desire And Liberation Suite* is the Gospel of Shn Romanekhina; his intention being to infuse the music with a similar spirituality. Not an ethereal, saffron-robed New Age project, you understand, but what transpires comes on like late period Coltrane, where motivational jazz improving & sometimes pushed to breaking point as expression enters feverish, non-idiomatic territory. Dunmall's and Picard's senior solos, while gripping in their intensity, adhere too closely to the contours of Coltrane's turbulent path of ascent. Elsewhere, the group's charts swing high over Lurier's breezy polymhythmic energy. Attractive enough, but rather disappointing for those who've come to expect the unconventional from this personnel!

CHRIS BLACKFORD

PHOTO: JEAN-MICHEL DESGRANGES

for films selected works for moving pictures: edit. 2

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The Deviants

Dentists #3

CAPTURE RPR C100-061 CD

Poetics

Remixes Of Recordings 1977-1983

CDR0001/0002/0003 CD

The Deviants were the house group for the 60s UK freak scene based at the Notting Hill Gate end of Swinging London. Lost by *es International* Times wrote Mick Farren, with support from, among others, guitarist Paul Rudolph and drummer Russell Hunter (both Pink Fables) they exploded out of nowhere, proudly waving aloft their self-produced debut album *Proof* under the noses of anyone who had chosen to take them seriously.

At the time *Proof* caused a mini-sensation with its (then) radical rock approach — which owed more to *The Mothers Of Invention* and *The Fugs* than to The Beatles or Pink Floyd — and (more memorably) its gauzy fold-out Lichtenstein-like Pop Art poster cover. Deviants #3 — with its notorious ice lolly-sucking run cover — originally came out on Transatlantic. Third time round, the group were burning out of steam; their original vision was fading fast. Yet the occasional spark of warped genius can still be heard: "Black George Does It With His Tongue" is a mad, vocally driven drum solo that wedgedly pokes fun at all those pomposo supergroup rock stiffs that went all but the most rabid fans scurrying to the bar, while "Billy The Master" and "Metamorphosis Exploration" are rambling examples of The Deviants at their anarchic best. What with its scope references and group groppings, however, the rest of the record has unfortunately aged badly.

Much more interesting is the triple CD set from Poetics, an Ann Arbor-based art school group from the mid-70s which included fine artist and ex-Destroy All Monsters manman Mike Kelley in their ranks as drummer, organ player and noise maker.

The same experimentation with vocals and subversive playing techniques that dominated early Stooges performances rippled like loupenges under the surface. Only Poetics have a stronger sense of the surreal, and their musical humor is burnt black around the edges. Their mission was to unpeel rock's shroud to see what it was made of, only to unceremoniously rip it to shreds. They do the same thing to contemporary electronic music, (jokingly) retelling Morton Subotnick's greatest hit on "Silver Oranges Of The Moon" and even (albeit lovingly) Sun Ra. Their punny treatment of his "Rocket #9" may be a scaled down Toys'R'Us version of the Asteroids' 60s prototype, but it still manages an effective enough blast off! An impressive document, best experienced by periodically diving in and getting out once you've had enough.

EDWIN POURCE

Thomas Dimuzio

Sonorous

RELEASES 8806022 200

Solarus

Empty Nature

RELEASE RR 65695 CD

Flux

Protoplasmat

RELEASE RR 65695 CD

Water sputz, analogia synth, trumpet, thunderstorm, shrinkwrap machine, broken water pipe, MDI controlled audio processors, black tiles, a few of the items used by Boston based composer Dimuzio in making this double CD of soundworks. That's not to say it's a sonic free-for-all. Dimuzio is after coherence: most of the samples are treated beyond recognition before they're allowed to enter his rich, vivid narratives. So, when on "AutoUnion" a brief slice of dance pumping intrudes, it's a shock — everything else proceeds without such clanking rhythmic imperatives. Anything this indulgent gives off a kind of warmth, despite the inescapable sombre tone of some of the atmospheres. It's a dense and strongly textured affair, but only downside being that it might provoke feelings of hi-fi inadequacy.

Solanus and Flux both involve avant guitar. James Plotkin. Although only briefly as "additional musician" on Solanus, basically the duo of Kep Johnsson and Bill Yurkevich, his casual, drifting work here is the dominant voice on an album otherwise mostly made up of simple bass and drum parts and wavy synth atmospheres. Quiet and directionless, it steers for a hypnotic effect but in the end it's driven by its own tempered rawness. There are occasional dubby percussive gestures, but the work would be enhanced by a bit more happening in the mix.

The Flux album, produced by Nick Harris, is more interesting. This time the music is all Plotkin's own work, and the guitar receives rocker backings. His more aggressive playing is directed into sharp, looping statements. The spoken word passages, written and delivered by Ruth Collins in an unconvincing monotone, don't much for the music. The glassy guitar parts are far away the album's most emoting aspect. Though the bass and percussion resolve clearly enough, their function is to provide a launchpad for the bass-inducing fingerings that lies in the top lines.

WILL MONTGOMERY

Dissolve

Third Album For The Sun

GRANBY ISLAND C101 CD

Philosopher's Stone

Preparation

GRANBY ISLAND C101 CO

Dissolve are a New Zealand based duo comprising guitarists Roy Montgomery and

Chris Heaphy who set base musical elements — guitars, bass and organ — roasting in their own space with drums to give them forward momentum. "Pressure Too Far" features the bleached vocals of Joanne Woodward (of The Butts), backed by tremolo guitars and Fender organ sounding uncannily like Pink Floyd's Rick Wright on "Ummagumma". Despite their basic instrumentation, Dissolve have few antecedents, although Rett sometimes investigated similar areas.

Only occasionally does the magic become prosaic. The duo have an intuitive knock of locking two-chord changes and tritone into a repetitive, shifting structure. When the mazza guitars, bass and stoking Fender kick together on the magnificent opener, "Requie Satelite", it forms an aural portal to the other side. I know that sounds nappy — I've just laughed myself — but listen to this fantastic music and you'll hear what I mean.

Philosopher's Stone is Amps Gorilla. Michel Prekop has a similar effect to Dissolve, though it's resolutely non-rock. It's constructed from loops generated by guitar, percussion and all manner of concrete sources. These can sound like footfalls through a spectral landscape, as on "Through Paradise Tree". Mega-turd wedges of teeth-grating noise are occasionally drilled into the mix for short durations, as on "Places Where The Mind Dies". They might be nothing compared to Meadow or KK Null, but in this context they'll give you leaping for the volume control. Such dissonant blends aside, Preparation is spartan music that works at least 50 per cent by implying something that is not there. Elsewhere, when Michel tiles his voice on "Where Regress End", it sounds for a moment like Scott Walker singing with The Haiffr Two. It's a shame he didn't make greater use of this combination.

PIERRE BARRIEU

Etage 34

3388VTR005 5607 CD

Solosante Etages

De Sa Bouché De Loup

3388VTR005 CD

Free rock (or even avant rock) might be virtually extinct in the UK of the 90s, but it's still very much alive and kicking in France. Etage 34 and its bigger brother Solosante Etages began in the early 80s. The pool of musicians associated with these groups have since become key actives in French experimental music, particularly in the fertile Nancy scene. Etage 34 is a similar proposition to its predecessor Etende (1995), the trio of Daniel Kronkowitz, Oliver Paquette and Dominique Repouard continues an assault on the eardrums with their relentless high energy, high density improvised rock. Unlike Healy Metal

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Three blasts of translucent Germanic Electronica with a common attraction to noise. Peter Kraut (see *Bites, The Wire* 16.1) is a jazz-soaked resident of Berlin, an organiser of the adventurous Taktlos festival, and a former member of Kevin Martin's multi-stranded noise thrusters God. A downbeat feel characterises the music: the blurred outlines of Hip-Hop are everywhere evident, the drum patterns superimposed with mangled, unrecognisable samples. The sound is rough textured and sparse. Distortion is a fundamental tool. The rhythms Kraut establishes are tatty rigid, but what drags you into the music are the noises: while the rhythmic feel derived from the bruised and corrupted Hip-Hop sometimes lock the music down, the gneaning splinters of treated sound thrown into the mix are where the music really engages. Sometimes the unwanted gliss of, say, torured Hammond or distressed voices obscures the working electronics grawing through the pieces. But if the 'jazzy' sound quotes don't, in the end, work as interestingly as the album's more brutal ingredients, it is a clever

**Farmers Manual**

assembled arrangement of sounds nonetheless.

Former rock musician Christian Fennesz brings guitars to his music, a kind of stretched, suspended meeting of rock and Techno. The two affect each other in various ways. At times he approaches the enigmatic sweep of Man, at others the music drifts into looping dance patterns or settles into a kind of active drone before switching to cunctus, winsome, guitar driven song sections. It's hard to locate precisely what motors the music, but a starting point might be the humungous consonance sleep in both dance and rock. In any case the diverse inputs on the album are thoughtfully integrated. Although the music is partly about the allure of repetition, it never loses its ever evolving, organic feel.

Visiting the Farmers Manual website the other evening to look at the live video link with the FM workspace, perhaps to witness the beginnings of one their legendary all-night sessions, I found that the musocavycyber explorers were nowhere in sight, though the FM cat could dimly be seen settling down among the hardware. It was a strange intrusion of

domesticity, given the roughness of the music Farmers Manual produce. However, first impressions of a recklessly jagged enterprise given in pleasure at a playful, provisional music made of eccentric, twisted drum patterns and scratchy analogue sounds. It sounds quite casually assembled but the work is alive with combative energy. Like both the above albums a core part of their approach is in shredding familiar sounds, but FM bring a liberating irresponsibility to what they do. The samples are slung in almost casually. Levels see-saw reminding you how rarely they do, with tracks ranging from a very quiet ten minute ooze to one whose tones are pitched pianally loud and high. Their open train-set approach to the technology is what makes this Viennese collective so strong, and the music arises apart the linear, programmatic associations of so much popular machine music. Oh, and tracks 16 to 98 are mere looped squeaks, drawn out over five minutes, in a digital rediscovery of vinyl's friendlich locked groove technique. Unerring.

WILL MONTGOMERY

groups, however, Etage 34's wall of sound aesthetic provides plenty of vertically layered textural details without arresting the music's powerful linear thrust. Replicad's cyanacrylate guitar eschews the tedium of monumental riffing, while Koskowicz's unpredictable polyrhythmic activity brings them closer to Liver-Jones than Cozy Powell. Those with dodgy wooders beware Paquette's awesome bass guitar.

Solamente Egoes consists of the aforementioned trio members, plus Yves Boll, Jacques Debout and Francois Deltz. Their last album, Revolutionary Suicide (1994), included a free jazz input from saxophonist Deunk Laro, for De So Bouche De Loup ('From His Wolf Mouth') they've recruited musical concrete specialist Jérôme Noyenier who, like Boll and Debout, wields electronics, records and tapes of found sounds. The group's music now has a broader sweep with more complex and unpredictable shifts in density, dynamics and timbre, while maintaining the edge-of-seat uncertainty of real-time improvisation. Important and exciting work by inventive musicians.

CHRIS BLACKFORD**Susanna Ferrar**A Boy Leaves Home
mesh004 CD**Phil Durrant**Borrowed
acta 10 CD

Opposite knocks for these two seasoned British Improv wankers, both of whom are making their solo album debuts. Susanna Ferrar has appeared on albums by Sylvia Hellett, Lol Coxhill and on Siem's Women Who Voices compilation. Like Hellett's 1992 solo debut for Muhi, A Day Leaves Home presents Ferrar working in a variety of settings — solos duets, environmental soundscapes. Where the former worked for Hellett, whose distinctive abilities as a composer and improvisor unified the diverse strands, it seems inappropriate for Ferrar, who is less distinctive across the range. Too much here is embryonic, and some of Ferrar's vocal folk ingredients border on the twee. Best are the improvised duets, where her thoughtfully judged folk inflections (on voice) engage in a pleasingly spiky dialogue with Evan Parker's loquacious soprano sax. Coxhill and

Hellett also make guest appearances.

Phil Durrant is well respected by admirers of top-notch UK Improvising groups such as Chris Bum Ensemble, News From The Shed, and his trio with John Butcher and John Russell. But this is the first time I've heard him solo. Sowain includes five 'Improvisations within structures' for acoustic violin, and five for violin transformed by electronics. The acoustic pieces, where Durrant really pushes the instrument into new areas of expression imaginatively explore a particular texture or developmental process. '303 202 101', a homage to Roland analogue synths, bears a remarkable resemblance to Evan Parker's seamless, circular breathing innovations on soprano sax. 'Sowain (For Violin)' slowly evolves by the subtlest shifts in gradations of texture, while 'Wingsback' unleashes the sort of extreme, traumatic tonics you'd expect from an electric guitar. Less compelling are the electronic transformations, which, though intermittently fascinating, as continuous pieces lack sufficient cohesion to hold the attention. Even so, Durrant deserves greater international recognition.

CHRIS BLACKFORD**Soliman Gamil**A Map Of Egypt Before The Sands
TOUCH T33 15 CD**Mahmoud Fadil**The Drummers Of The Nile
PRIMAL PIRI 147 CD

In the sleeve notes to *A Map Of Egypt Before The Sands*, Egyptian composer Soliman Gamil describes his homeland as 'the starting point in the evolution of musical civilisation'. He is talking specifically about melodic instruments such as the nay, a flute made out of a reed, rather than drums which were probably developed a few thousand miles to the south well before the beginnings of ancient Egyptian civilisation. This implicit linking of Egyptian music to the Western tradition is made clear in Gamil's music, a surprisingly successful fusion of the acidity of Middle Eastern scales and the sweetness of Egyptian melody.

A Map Of Egypt is a compilation of tracks from Gamil's two previous Touch albums, *The Egyptian Music And Arish*, in which traditional Egyptian instruments sit alongside elements from the orchestral spectrum. On some

tracks, Gamil uses flutes and cobs to double Egyptian instruments like the salloum (a flute) and the mizmar (a reed instrument), on others any hint of Egypianism is avoided by keeping the two separate — the timpani pounds away like it's still on duty for the 1812 Overture while the folk musicians are left alone to do their thing. For purists, there are tracks where there is no Western influence whatsoever; otherwise, the most interesting explorations of tone and timbre occur under conditions of forced osmosis.

Mahmoud Fadil takes the exact opposite track and downplays any melodic sensibility in favour of rhythm. Featuring rhythms from the Nubian region in the south to Cairo in the north, *Drummers Of The Nile* feels almost like an Egyptian version of *Ultimate Boos And Brows*. Revelling in the minute distinctions between, say, the 'Hippie' beat and the 'Falahi' rhythm, *Drummers Of The Nile* is a compendium of Egyptian swing that allows both the uninitiated and scholars to get their grooves on to the undeniably pulse of the djembe and darbuka. Despite the presence of oud and accordion intermissions, the album might be a bit too one-dimensional: the rhythms really move on their own, but the real magic lies in their interaction with the breathing melodies.

PETER SHAPIRO

Grateful Dead

Fallout From The Phil Zone
GRATEFUL DEAD 6002 4052 2CD

Grateful Dead

Dick's Picks Volume 7
GRATEFUL DEAD 6002 4027 3CD

This far down the line, it's difficult to believe that Grateful Dead cut their teeth playing the Bay Area ballroom circuit. Before they started writing their own material, their early to late 60s sets were built out by extended jams on blues, rock 'n' roll and Motown hits. Now the idea of ballrooms full of acid-fuelled freaks dippy dancing to The Dead keeping track of time and space 17 minutes into, say, Wilson Pickett's 'In The Midnight Hour', might not jive well with contemporary definitions of pagan-

rance music. There again, getting locked in a computer programmed groove for hours on end is all well and good for dancing on the spot, but The Dead knew the difference between getting lost in music and going pleasantly numb through mindless repetition. To hear their great, stumbling erratic forays onto the dancefloor now, some 30 years later, is to experience afresh the thrill of entering this dimension through a microdot and ending up who knows where. The outstanding passages of *Fallout From The Phil Zone* — based on Phil Lesh's personal travel of highlights buried in their live archive, from 1967–1995 — are extraordinary soundscapes of song styles and improvisations that could only have happened in that short period of grace in the 60s, before pop had fractured into mutually hostile marketing niches. Given his commitment elsewhere to experimental music, his concentration on R&B, blues and soul covers is surprising. But with 'Mile Lee Blues', Pickert's 'Midnight Hour', Otis Redding's 'Hand To Handle' and the Vandellas' hit 'Dancin' In The Street' (recorded between 1967–70), his selection underlines why they were far more potent releasing their improvisatory energies through the gradual liquefaction of a song's boundaries. These takes also make it clear how much the group would later miss their (relatively) straight man, vocale/keyboard player Ron Pupen.

Nothing on Dick's Picks Vol 7, recorded Pigeonholes at London's Alexandra Palace in 1974, matches the exuberance generated on Lesh's prime cuts. Former Dead manager Rock Scully's recall of the rest, in his book *Lena With The Dead*, makes it clear why the group were completely burnt out by a nonstop touring schedule. Now drugs were no longer a means of mind expansion but a crutch. Through the songs just about stay standing, it is because pretty much the whole Dead touring set-up is leaning heavily on mounds of cocaine. The combination of sustained roadwork and uppers has scoured the life out

of this set. Of course, The Dead would periodically rediscover the fluidity, and their way back to the musical dissolves throughout their career, as the later material — most specifically a tender version of 'Voices Of Johanna' from 1995 — on *Phil Zone* demonstrates. But anyone looking for proof that — in Robert Durst's immortal line from *Apocalypse Now* — Charlie don't surf can tune into the unequaled spectacle of The Dead slowly sinking beneath waves of tedium at Alexandra Palace.

BRIAN KOFF

Keith Jarrett

La Scala
TOC 1640 CD

Paul Bley

Hands On
EVANIE ESD 22184 CD

There are few turn-of-the-century jazzers to draw fire from anti-jazzers than solo pianists, the self-indulgence that many read into the form seems at its most extreme when the likes of Jarrett and Bley start their endless marathons. The musical basis of course has often served to make them play all the better: accusations of musical hubris are like challenges, to which Jarrett especially has risen to on many occasions. This time, however, both he and Bley are found wanting.

Bley's Hands On is marginally the less culpable of the two. He's always been a delicate player, a less-is-more man, usually high octane virtuosity is a means rather than an end in his idiosyncratic melodic and harmonic world. On the opener, 'Remembering', and the odd 'Ram-Dam', for example, the serene bluesy meditations of the introductory chords are slowly but surely unravelled and led away into a much more unsettling musical world: overcast and menacing, with machine-gunned salvos of black notes intermittently jolting and jarring the listener. But tightrope walking between thoughtful exploration and thoughtless exploitation is a dangerous game, and all things considered, Bley probably does us all a favour — not least himself — by bringing in

the album at a little under 53 minutes.

Jarrett, on the other hand, doesn't brook timidity. When Bley is refined, formal and taciturn, Jarrett is apocalyptically energetic. This goes for the quantity of his music as well as its quality. *La Scala* covers a full 76 minutes and quite frankly has barely enough ideas to adequately fill half that timespan. The much vaunted encore of 'Over The Rainbow' is merrily gorgeous, but the damage is done by then. The two massive stretches of pianistic rumination that precede it are lacking in authority and colour and even, on occasion, commitment. In a style as febrile as Jarrett's, this is a cardinal sin.

Jarrett's numerous forays into this format (Koen Concert, Sun Bear Concerts, etc) have all been conducted with a mighty will discipline. Even at his most diffuse, there was always a sense of direction about Jarrett's playing on those earlier recitals. The artist, inevitably, managed to force the listener to believe that those Italy fancies had a point to them. But that was then. Now, Jarrett's running on empty and, as technical triumphs notwithstanding the soft chromatic figures at the heart of 'La Scala' II are some of the most tender Jarrett's yet produced, this one feels like he's set the controls to cruise.

PAUL STIMP

Love Cry Want

Love Cry Want
NEW JAZZ INC-001 CD

Don Cherry

Brotherhood Suite
FLASH MUSIC PLCD-4 CD

Sun Ra And His Intergalactic Arkestra

Stardust From Tomorrow
160 GB LP 2150/36 2CD

Offhand I can't think of any valid reasons why Joe Gallivan is not more celebrated. He worked with well heavy gazers like Eric Dolphy, Gil Evans and Wilson Pickett, participated in a longstanding duo with Charles Austin, and ran admirable outfits like Neon Lighthouse and the Souldiers Of The Road, in whose ranks members

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CHARLY CRCD288 CD

Material

One Down
CHARLY CRCD282 CD

Bill Laswell

Baselines
CHARLY CRCD284 CD

Of the slew of Material reissues the earliest, *Temporary Music*, is for completists only, being well-titled as very much a product of its time. The year is 1979, *Material* is a basic unit of Bill Laswell, Michael Beinhorn and Fred Frith, and the opening number, "OAO", sounds like something ZZ Top might have produced as incidental music for *Flashdance*. Later sessions, from 1980 and 1981, find little new to say, and it's hard to imagine anyone now being taken with this tired strain of Alt-Rock Disco.

Memory Servies dates from 1981, and what a difference a year makes. Well, a year plus the additional input of Sonny Sharrock, Fred Frith, Henry Threadgill, George Lewis, Oku Dara, Béla Bang, and Charles K. Noyes. Sure, it still sounds like 1981, but suddenly the year doesn't sound so bad, with *Material* much less a slave to four square rhythm. The codas of "Disappearing" has Dara's trumpet and Laswell's guitars baseline riding on a wave of hi-hat, echoing Miles' *On The Corner*. The next track features Bang's violin and Frith's guitar in a mutant disco hoedown, while the next is more self-consciously avant garde. Overall, *Memory Servies* manages to be both hip and cheesy. The closing tracks go further, forging a distinctive *Material* identity which, although not as refined as that of *Hallucination Engine* over a decade later, compensates with an unbound sense of possibility.

Sadly, this sense is betrayed by 1983's *One Down*, the third in *Material*'s punchbowl. Out goes Fred Frith, in comes Nile Rodgers, and the compromised dollar bill on the cover



Bill Laswell

is as good as a symbol of the outing as any. Actually, the two tracks featuring Nile Rodgers are the best, presumably because he has a strong musical identity and a direction of his own to impose. The mildly infamous "Memories" unites Whitney Houston and saxophonist Archie Shepp to very little positive effect. The remainder is a pallid, soulless pop fusion.

Laswell's next move was to drop the *Material* tag and record under his own name. *Baselines* still features Beinhorn, but Frith is out; Frith and Lewis guest again, as do percussionists Ronald Shannon Jackson and David Moss, and saxophonist Ralph Carney. Here Laswell displays his distinctive deep, queasy bassines to good effect, and his is the bedrock on which everything else rests: it's unaffected, cliche-free take on the strain of funk jazz fusion constitutes the protean precursor of Laswell's hallmark sound, although the closing "Conversation" comes closer to a playful Zorn/Eye duet than to his polished work on *Avon*.

TIM OWEN

Ike Iwan Parker, Steve Wilkesman, Paul Dunnell and Guy Barker served

Gallivan helped Robert Hoag develop the drum synthesizer *With Love Cry Wam*, an innovative group lead by the legendary mono-monickered Nicholas, he played drums, steel guitar and synth alongside percussionist Jimmy Holden and organist Larry Young. In June 1972, when LCM gigged in Lafayette Park, across from the White House, Nicholas was test-driving a prototype polyphonic synth. Neighbour Richard Nixon, alarmed by the strange sounds, tried to get the concert stopped. Where Presidential pressure failed, record industry similarly succeeded: the tapes were suppressed until now Nixon would have liked to know how that was done.

In the 70s most jazz organists fell into one of two camps — funky (like Jimmy Smith) modest, low-re-sprayed and waddled onto the Acid Jazz chassis or (hey the minority Alice Coltrane party) — but by 1972 Young was beating other paths, and is best known for his contribution to fusion with Miles, Lifetime and John McLaughlin. LCM learned from late 60s Miles, but they played much looser music, and Young capitated on this. These raw, ferocious, adventurous performances show what fusion might have been, and can stand alongside the best of Young's Blue Note cuts as a convincing memorial.

Don Cherry's *Brotherhood* Sure contains more retrieved concerts. The five tracks span seven years (1968-74), four venues, and

varying personnel. There is superb work by (Bert Rosengren on four pieces, and it's interesting to hear Torbjörn Hultgren the bewilderred bassist on Albert Ayler's first recordings in 1964) taking the new music in his stride. Cherry plays impressively throughout. There's no question of scraping the barrel: this collection of live performances puts some of his studio sessions of the time in the shade.

Sun Ra took the precaution of creating his own legend, his own system of mythology, during his lifetime. If names define determine, Herman/Sonny-Lee Blount took pre-emptive action, assuming the title of a deity but letting friends call him Mr Mystery. He pioneered electronic keyboards in the 1950s, and may

have arrived at that music before anyone else. Mixing bluesy earthiness and mystical whimsy, he sometimes got the blend wrong, but not at the 1989 gig. Star turns include Earl Smith, Marshall Allen, June Tyson and Julian Priester. You'll wish you'd been there.

BARRY WITHERDEN

Wynton Marsalis & The Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra

Blood On The Fields
COLUMBIA CRCD7694 CD

Wynton Marsalis's music may not be the typical We reader's first choice. Wynton has his fair share of detractors who make much of his, or more precisely his advocates' bumptious insistence on his being some kind of keeper of the eternal flame of jazz. Yet there is no denying Marsalis's facility as a musician, and in recent times he has been forging ahead as a composer, working on commissions for increasingly large ensembles in a variety of performance genres. *Blood On The Fields* is an apotheosis of this process, a three CD, three hour jazz opera on the theme of slavery.

In the 15-strong Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra, James Carter deservedly takes the fair share of the limelight with some rich, earthy blowing on banjo, sax and clarinet. Most attention, however, will inevitably fall on Cassandra Wilson and Paula Griffith in the lead vocal roles of Jesus and Leonie, prince and commoner, sold into slavery and transported to America. Jon Hendricks has the dubious pleasure of being cast in the third vocal role of Juba, a wise man in the guise of a fool who oversees Jesus's conversion to Strong Black American. The subject is treated with a due measure of gravity and feeling, which doesn't prevent the sentiment from cloying, but that's opera for you. More importantly, the music embraces modernity in its respect for the jazz tradition, which means that it can encompass both Rahsaan Roland Kirk and Duke Ellington as models for syncopation and evolution in the music. Over the full three hours the composition sprawls a little and attention may wane, but this is an altogether more earthly and open-ended music than we have come to expect from Wynton's pen. The title track itself is a typically raw, gambolesque performance.

TIM OWEN

Maurizio - Maurizio

NO NUMBER CD

Vainqueur

Elevations
CHM REACTION CRD 02 CD

When Berlin Techno label Basic Channel terminated operations, their mission presumably fulfilled, with the release of their solitary CD, they might not have intended it as

a tombstone erected to mark vinyl's passing, but since then the surviving operation has tempered its extreme prejudice against the digital format. Further down the chain of command, CD releases by Chan Reac'h artists are perhaps less of a surprise — even so, Vanqueur's is only the second — but a disc from one of BC's main men, that most passionate of vinyl proselytizers, Maurizio (aka Monz Von Dived), still feels tantamount to heresy.

Yet on closer scrutiny, Maurizio is less an act of renunciation than a continuation of the war for vinyl by other means. The compilation is extracted from the later sequence of Maurizio 12", from M4 through to the simultaneously issued vinyl slice M7, which it trailers twice with an edit and an unreleased mix. For, like the Basic, Chan's CD, Maurizio works brilliantly in its own right as a home listening disc, yet the edit label sticker over seven of the nine tracks is a tantalizing reminder that these versions are incomplete. Somewhere out there are the authorative director's cuts. It has to be said that Maurizio has a point about vinyl. A direct comparison of the CD with the originals reveals that, not only is the depth of sound considerably reduced in digital form, but you also lose the sheer physicality of the vinyl cutting into the groove. What you gain on CD, however, is a clearer impression of the symmetrical perfection of Maurizio's dance designs. They begin like the abstracted shunt of Kraftwerk's *Trans Europa Express*. They're then slightly syncopated and turned slowly through a cycle that almost imperceptibly starts slipping out of sync. That is, all the time the tracks seem to be moving in a direct line, they're actually sheering off in a more intriguing direction. The asymmetrical effect Maurizio introduces into perfect symmetries is heightened with mild skank dub elements. The combination was so beautifully realized on "PST" and "PST" — best experienced over the distance of the 12", but they still work well in this context — that they're impossibly hard acts to follow.

Following similar archetypal principles, the "W" tracks trailer'd here are worth the wait. Stuck right in the middle of the disc is a take of the Domina single on which Maurizio undertook for a side project of former Asai Ra Tempel guitarist Manu Gotthics. Its stripped minimalist completeness belies the original artist, who inevitably rejected it. Possibly for good reason: it flows more readily into the M beatbox than it does into Gotthics' wavelorme. The "M" Maurizio superimposed over that release's label (reproduced on the cheap in crayon box BC related discs are now packaged in) resembles the M of the child murderer in Fritz Lang's thriller *N*. A corollence or an ironic acknowledgement of Maurizio's violation of the Domina original? Be warned: this is the kind of dangerous speculation the mystery surrounding the Basic Channel's M4 set up leads you to.

Maurizio once perpetrated an astonishing earthquake mix of a Vanqueur track, "Lyt",

taken Vanqueur's *Rime Love* a succession of self-effacing 12" releases on Chan Reac'h to conquer its memory. Constructed around various versions of "Elevation", with two takes of "Solance" and one each of "Reduce" and "Anstatic" joined in, his first full length CD eventually feels more at home with itself than Maurizio's. Perhaps it's because he's worked it up from more head-in material. It sounds like he has heavily processed soiled chorale voices into the dense blocks from which he constructs his rhythm tracks. His rhythm meshes are not so tightly knit as Maurizio's, but they're stronger from wider DNA. When a mail order ad once mislabeled the artist "Van Quer", they were perhaps onto something. The unintended vanity skip aside, there is something so slippery about Vanqueur's squeaky pitched his music is positively erotic.

BIRKA KOPF

Medeski Martin And Wood

Shack-man

GRAMOPHON GCD75514 CD

Medeski Martin And Wood

Bubblehouse

GRAMOPHON GCD5-1001 CD

Hard to believe that Medeski Martin And Wood could make it to Shoo-won, their fourth album, without garnering a higher profile in the UK. In the United States they have outgrown the coffee house circuit and now play in arenas. This may be a shame for their audience, but it's no more than they deserve. Central to their sound is John Medeski's Hammond B-3 organ, but the group interaction as a whole is highly impressive: drummer Billy Martin and bassist Chris Wood's contributions to the group's spacious, second nature improvisations and fluent grooves are equally distinctive. Unlike Morphine, whose six plus rhythm line up may invite comparison, Medeski Martin And Wood do not play to invented notions of pop cultural iconography. Where the Horoptone has sound waves pay explicit homage to their 1980s and more influences, Medeski's is a distinctly new voice on the Hammond, and stylizedly works on the clarinet or the Wurlitzer electric piano a very much part of a specific musical conception, not merely a recourse to cliche textures. I should think that the recording process, for which the group convened an Hawaiian shack with no electricity into an improvised recording studio, also contributed significantly to the sound and success of the recording, which manages to be simultaneously focused and laidback.

The additional tracks on a new EP, *Bubblehouse*, arguably the happiest item in your local record store, write some interesting comparisons. Beside a *Shack-man* outtake sit two remixes by the litewit collective We, and a third by DJ Logic with a saxophone contribution by John Zorn. On the latter,

Logic's mix heightens the languorous mood while Zorn produces slow, sensual lines. We should be more uneasy partners; their urban dystopia paled against MPMW's tropical funk, but even their "1D 00 PM Whr R Your Chlm" mix of "Spy Kiss" is cool and lazy.

TINI OWEN

Merzbow/Gore Beyond Necropsy

Rectal Anarchy

RELEASE RR 6962 CD

Aube/Katsumi/Kosakai

Mondie Bruts

JAPAN CHERISH CMC00 00020 CD

Yuragi

Yakuoku No Chu (Promised Land)

CREATUREMAN 0062 CM00 00020 CD

Say, is that a 5D CD Merzbow box set in your pocket, or are you just pleased to be erecting a monumental indictment of the music business? The news that Extreme (of Melbourne) are planning such a box set will certainly leave some of us gasping and spent, clutching our flaccid wallets. Or if this searing sexual innuendo is not to your taste, perhaps you'll get on better with the anal antics of Rectal Anarchy. This is a typically frenzied collaboration between noise boss Merzbow and the fetchingly named Gore Beyond Necropsy, who are a Japanese five piece. Dr Industrial Punk Grinder is credited with "enormous fleshy butchery". Track seven (there are 31) is titled "Split-Crotch Disorder Rectal Anarchy", and track 13 is "Melt & Mounds Rectal Footh Anarchy". Do you need more? Behind the CD is a seedy photo of a microphone nestled between her buttocks. To be fair, the CD artwork is very good, and mainly consists of punky photo images of a Japanese streetpunk group.

The first track lasts 24 minutes and is a scalding shower of fuzz and roiling recorded live at Lafahama, Tokyo. The other (studio) tracks are short. It's a musical environment so extreme that music cannot survive in it. Listening, even at low volume, I feel like a puny human facing attack from vastly superior aliens — my weapons are useless against them. But surely these people hate music?

Well, maybe not. The Aube/Mondie Bruts album is a collection of four Japanese noise specialists trying their hand at something a tad lighter. "A new shade of ambience from Japanese harsh noise crew?" explains the sleeve. Aube makes crazy scientist noises from the sum of brain waves and an electroencephalogram. Katsumi Sugihara from the group Solmania does a dark warm analogue synth thing. Fumio Kosakai from Incapacitated creates an intriguing highlight zone by applying effects to double bass and bowed percussion. Mondie Bruts gently bloop and bleep their way through some snowwaves. And Honori plays pulp and regurgitation' oops, that's the other CD. The whole album is

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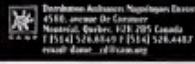
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**μ-Ziq**

Lunatic Harness

PLANET HUMU CORUS CD202

Squarepusher

Big Loada

WARP/WARPSO CD12

There's more being harnessed on the new μ-Ziq CD than creator Mike Paradesis's Juicy. Tempting though it is to focus on the extreme breakbeat experimentation, it would be wrong to ignore the frequent affinities with Aphex Twin styled symphonic Electronica. And though to these ears "Wannabe", with the year's most unlikely Spice Girls reference, sounds like Tom Waits meets zoviet/France, sporting soundalikes is a spurious game. What needs to be said about Paradiso is that he's a true original. He may borrow from the syntax of the musical languages surrounding him, but these elements are then reorganized in a cyphered language, spoken in tongues. It's tempting to latch onto elements like the frenetic drum'n'bass, or the passages of baculum Electro ambience, which test fit with our understanding, but it's better to surrender yourself and go with the flow. Sometimes this can be scary, but it's always thrilling to find yourself in a new place. So thrilling, in fact, that Paradiso's music may be one of the few modern art forms where overt allusions and references seem like betrayals of his promise, as when exploring the music of an exotic or other culture, only to discern a junkstone synthesizer in the mix. But again, it's spurious to hold these moments against μ-Ziq when the music is so vital, so far ahead of the game.

It's tempting to see Paradiso and Tom Jenkinson (aka Squarepusher) as fellow travellers in breakbeat synergies, although their music accentuates quite different influences. With Paradiso it's Hip Hop. With Jenkinson it's Techno. Compare "Lunatic Harness" with "Full Ruisse (Featuring MC Twin Tuff)" from Squarepusher's "Big Loada" for the best illustration. You'll find "Big Loada" in the singles rack in your record shops, a typically generous EP from Warp, weighing in at just under half an hour with seven new tracks. Typical, too, that it contains material every bit as strong as that on his last full-length album, *Hard Normal Daddy*. The stand-out "Come On My Selector" is the knockout, the most ridiculously virtuous display of the Pusher's meld of slapped bass and manic breakbeats yet committed to record.

TOM OWEN

coloured by a pleasant naivety, though it's conceptually more complex than the monolithic racket these guys usually do in.

Yuragi is the project of guitarist Hidenobu Kaneko, who has assembled musicians from noise group Incapacitants, CCC, Giorama and Zanou Kesabu. The album switches from minimal percussion to trashy free jazz, via nondescript rock riffing with squalling guitar solos. I don't like any of it, but I think the bits I like least are the strummed 12-string guitar with Tibetan drone singing. Don't give up the noise day job.

CLIFFE BELL

film scoring under his belt, writes with a firm ear on ready themes, precise rhythms and a hold on complex lines. The atmosphere of the score is changeable, almost episodic, as its development passes through numerous configurations before bursting out in a swing tempo and accompanying broad strokes. The piano work, all the more sober for its modal undertones, is controlled and reflective. Rewarding, but also interesting as a piece written from within the heart as opposed to the fringes.

LOUISE GRAY

David Murray Quartet

Long Goodbye

DR 900 CD

David Murray

Po Deafik Revue

JAZZ TIME JUST 94 CD

Dominic Muldowney

Piano Concerto/Saxophone Concerto

BPM CLASSICS 7243 566529 CD

Paul Patterson

Concerto For Orchestra/Euphorium/Missa Brevis

BPM CLASSICS 7243 66529 CD

Although neither Dominic Muldowney nor Paul Patterson deserve the entomental temble reputation that some bestow upon these (less than infant) British composers, there are, perhaps, certain aspects to consider. Prime among them is that both manifest an unusual and commendable desire to go against any discernible flow whatsoever. They don't shock (like Turnage), they don't give great soundbytes (like Steve Martland); they don't follow any school of 'isms' (start list now...). There is a sense, in both these composers' repertoires, of original works created as both response and riposte to previous generations and musics.

Manege so in the case of Patterson's release, which takes in a lyrical choral work, an orchestral piece commissioned by The European Community Orchestra and the dominating orchestral concerto. These might sound quite tame. Previously a champion of composers like Penderecki and Lutoslawski, Patterson's own work had reflected many of the singular devices that these Poles (and others, principally Ligeti) used to produce a particularly shimmering harmonic fragrance. This stopped when Patterson, prompted perhaps by his academic teaching experience, felt communication could be more direct if it was less abstract. This is a contentious area, nevertheless, there is plenty to consider in Patterson's new style. Beyond the weighty style of *Missa Brevis* or the playfulness of *Euphorium*, it's the concerto that holds out most ideas. It's rippled through with themes and motifs to create a dense and dynamic work.

Two concertos from Muldowney (one for piano and BBC Symphony Orchestra, the other for saxophone soloist John Harle with the London Sinfonietta), show just how diverse the communication issue has become. Muldowney, who has been involved in numerous Brecht/Weill projects and has much

long Goodbye is a tribute to Don Pullen, who died in 1995. Murray first recorded with him in 1977 as a member of Low Class Conspiracy and went on to employ him on the *ho-hum Children and, on organ, the Shabs!* album. It's a pity more of their work together isn't preserved, as both musicians so keenly interrogate and build on jazz tradition. Unfortunately, *Long Goodbye* doesn't do much to retrospectively plug the gap. Pullen's four compositions don't travel very well, and the aching Lawrence 'Bunch' Horns composition is the most memorable piece of writing. Paul DD Jackson, a former Pullen pupil, acquires himself well, but Murray is of course the dominant voice. However, though his rich language can still sound great, it doesn't seem to move forward well; ideas like 'forward' are grey areas with Murray's radical hold on the past. Perhaps the most affecting playing comes on the sparse slogging of 'Common Ground'; it's hard to say that even when the verges on autopilot it's an impressive sound — just yet still not the full *Monty*.

"Lie here to look you in the face before you have a story on your instrument," Murray once said. So what has he done to get himself a story? His recent *Grateful Dead* tribute album was no solution. Po Deafik Revue has him bringing a sit-down American jazz band together with some shaggy-rope and musicians, among them master drummer Doudou N'Daye Rose. In the accompanying notes Murray says he believes the group will be his most significant achievement, a political statement and a way of addressing the problems facing people of African descent through music, song, poetry and rap. The raps come courtesy of leading African Hip-Hoppers Positive Black Soul — one text is written by Armin Beraké. The end result is a unique Allemagne/Jazzfusion overlaid with unstable synth stuff. It's hard to believe Murray really thinks songs with titles like "One World Family" and "Too Many Hungry People" add up to much of a political statement. The music feels between all available stools, with

Jamaladeen Tacumi's bass failing to mesh with the Sengalese percussion. Who knows if this group will evolve into something more elastic and adventurous? For now it tells very short of its aims.

WILL PINTON/PIPER

• + Note

Mikro Makro
NOTONRASER/MUSIC CDR 005 CD

Note

**
NOTONRASER CD

Golem

Stad. Stmk
NOTONRASER/MUSIC CDR 005 CD

Minimal to the max, the German Rastermusic label (Raser means 'pulse') combines the burning chrome digital abstractions of Finland's Sähkö label with Touch's love of obscure sound sources. These three new CDs on the label's Nostos imprint are barely there: all are presented in clear CD jewel cases; the tracks listed in black ink on transparent stickers affixed to the front. The music sounds like it has been made under a high degree of self discipline and patient experimentation — but you won't necessarily need those qualities as a listener/consumer to enjoy the best of what they hold. There's no doubt that these guys are seriously dropping science, but is it relaxation music for the Muji generation, or is there a state?

Music like this — call it dour, rather than power electronics — is on speaking terms with Morton Feldman and Philip Glass, as much as, say, Basic Channel or Plasticman. It's good to hear Panasonic's Mikio Yano, aka Ø, returning to the kind of obsessive sound explorations he fostered in us with 1995's *Hiro* album on Saito's Micro Mates, a shared CD (rather than a collaboration) with German artist Carsten Nicolai's cross-crossed by the external sounds of raw information in transit: fax, broadcast signal tones, modems, timecodes.

Beginning with a repeated, angry chord alternating with silence that jolts like a shrilling telephone, this gives way to a passage of extraordinary beauty, when digital tones resembling a bowed saw loom around each other like huge, melancholy carp in a dark pool, while a muted bass drum adds punctuation: duration charges exploding 1,000 metres below. His other piece on the CD needles with a wider array of noises, but lacks the focus or the emotional resonance of the first.

His sideman on the CD, Carsten Nicolai (Noto), seems to be the name to watch for fans of *The Music That Cannot Be Listened To*. While Driving — in Bernhard Gunter, Thomas Koner, Anthony Manning, and others. His two contributions to Mikro Makro apply tiny alterations over 12 minutes each to single noises, while the 72 tracks that make up the

single piece on = divided up into several discrete 'movements' act as an aural 'how-not-to' manual for a primitive MIDI studio. As such, it represents a form of virtuosity with the instruments and effects that puts the claims of some electronic musicians that digital music is 'timeless' into perspective. Invariably, there are some R2D2isms — perhaps intended, maybe an imitation of birdsong — but wasn't it just as ridiculous for Oliver Messiaen to imitate birdsong with a piano?

Golem is a mark for Dutchman Frans De Wardt, of experimental outfit Kapotte Muziek & Baaqueen, also known for being chairman of the board at Amsterdam's relentlessly uncommercial Staalgat label! The noses on Stad. Stmk all come out of the Student Stimulator, a control device invented to work students' mental reflexes and responses into a more receptive state. Play it in a crowded room and it'll do the same for your neighbours: the 12 tracks seem designed to tweak the hearing beyond its usual limits by shock tactics rather than gentle persuasion. Like Ryoji Ikeda's +/- CD, its frequency waveforms operate in straight lines: the listening experience is shaped to a series of on/off synaptic responses, while the notion of Ambience is subverted to include sound that has a far stronger degree of control over behaviour in public spaces than the benign inducements of mall Muzak.

ROB YOUNG

The Orchestre Murphy

Smut
ALCOHOL ALCD 00

L Voag

The Way Out
ALCOHOL ALCD 00

If Samuel Beckett had had his own bar band, might they have sounded like The Orchestre Murphy? Murphy was the one of the Nobel prize-winning curmudgeons' funniest novels: The Murphies on this album, a South London group with a pedigree of fine recordings over the last ten years, share a Beckett-like galloping humour and melancholy. "When the screen turns, and the hours look, will you pass out in a state of shock? Maybe... maybe not." In addition, Ireland is terribly mocked by pieces called "Cahirciveen" and "The Bantry Dance".

The Murphies have toured several times with Psychedelia guitarist Eugene Chadbourne, and singerguitarist Rob Murphy's avant garde connections are impeccable — he recently chose Isaac Mizrahi's Death Ambient to around the UK. The guitar, bass, and drums line up is fleshed out with a sleepy accordion, and colourful banjo, sax and trumpet drop in when required. As with Tom Waits, a musical overmeditatedness is clearly audible, even when the songs draw on well-known popular forms like disco-wop or the French chanson. The lackadaisical lycra and the one-take recording style has carefully crafted

songwriting. No slickness, but a fragile charm, always on the verge of falling apart. "When we danced to Bertolt Brecht, I felt something disconnect."

The whole album is a lament. Apart from the occasional banjo line, the music doesn't sound like Tom Waits at all, but they have a similar appeal. Long-term fans will be pleased that Smut maintains the high standard of the earlier Frankenstein and Bigotrotting (both on the Swiss label Out Of Depression). "Just Say", "Phonique" and the molicing opener "Bad Day At Bubbing Brook" are among the best things this unique and woolly underground outfit have produced.

The other album on Ed Baxter's new Alcohol label is a reissue of a cult classic from 1979, *The Way Out* by the mysterious L Voag. Voag was Amos from Amos & Sims a member of the punk rock group The Homosexuals, and had connections with This Heat and The Work. *The Way Out* is seriously weird post-punk to-f-f weakness, and releasing it 18 years later on CD feels like a deliberate challenge to the throwaway aesthetic of the time. Full marks for playful beatnik experimentation, as Voag messes with dub and musique concrète, and disguises his voice like Peter Sellers. The residue features 11 bonus tracks of Voag outtakes, demos, and the 1979 *Hove* EP. In a way these tracks stand up best, a little less anonymous musically, more stripped down and direct, especially when a solo Voag threshes his way through the tongue-in-cheek angst of "According To Freud".

CRAIG SELL

Archie Shepp

Four For Thrabo
ALCOHOL ALCD 00

In order to draw attention to Archie Shepp's 1964 major debut, John Coltrane posed with him on the cover wearing a rumpled blue jacket. Shepp wore a collarless shirt with ragged sleeves (plantation chick?) and sucked on a navel intellectual's pipe. Although Coltrane didn't play, he contributed four compositions: "Speedy's Rude Song", "Naima" and "Cousin Mary" (from *Giants Steps*) and "My Syms" (from *Play's The Blues*).

Saxophonists closer to Coltrane didn't fall into the trap of imitation. Shepp's incredible sax — a throaty, plaintive sob that groans as way into existence — isn't a stream of harmonic interrogation, but expression writhing from cracks in the floor. Drummer was Charles Moffett, whose previous gig had been with Ornette Coleman. Shepp was evidently influenced by the jazzian abrasiveness and unremitting melody of Ornette's alto — but he retains the guttural honks and erotic sensuality of the tenor sax lineage. Reggae! Worker's bass is round, resolute and funky, recorded by Rudy Van Gelder with surprising depth and resonance. Trombonist Roswell Rudd, altoist John Tchicai and trumpeter Alan Shorter are all aboard, and the arrangements

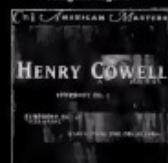
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Iannis Xenakis

Krausner

ISPHOESCHLIEDT 0975 CD

Seethe, surge and shudder, scurry, shimmer and sather: the sounds we hear during Krasnery might be described by one or other, or all of these verbs, even though of course, music does none of these things. The words suggest the proto-punk nature of Xenakis's music, which jettisons cherished Western notions of formal development and returns us to a time when music is not separable from noise; the pure sonic gesture. Listening to it creates an odd sense of timelessness, as if we might re-imagine these 75 minutes of musical event as one single moment of generative energy.

But we can never return to music's elemental, association-free state. Our musical memory is too capacious. A trombone, for instance, is an instrument with a history, and while few people have ever written for trombone the way Xenakis does, the sound still reaches us rich with associations: at times here, the two trombones recall the statue come to drag Mozart's Don Giovanni into the inferno; at others they sound like nothing so much as the zany antics of

George Chisholm, whose tolling trombone enlivened the "light entertainment" of my childhood. And those associations enrich, rather than impoverish my listening.

Krasnery was composed in 1968. It's a big piece for small orchestra: no percussion, but a dozen strings and 11 wood instruments; plus, crucially, a taped portion which at times all but engulfs the live instruments, at other times seems to merge with them, or even be the sound source from which they grow. Although the sleeve art (by DJ Spooky, who also worked the tape during this live performance by The ST-X Ensemble under conductor Charles Zacharie Bernstein) is more intriguing than informative, it does quote Xenakis, who suggests that the "biological tumult" and social transformation wrought by imminent population explosion provided a "founding perspective which underlined the composition of Krasnery".

Whether knowing that helps us to appreciate the piece is a moot point, but it does show that music concerned for global ecology doesn't have to be vacant philosophical or brute sloganising. It can, like Krasnery, be both subtle and tumultuously visceral.

NICK KIMBERLEY

are fantastic — Ellington-ish, yet cheeking with knife-edge tenses.

Four For Trane is one of the great records of all time, frontal transgression and recognitively fractious in tremendous dialogue. Never before had revolutionary intent sounded so physical and yet so tender. Epochal.

DEN WATSON

Silverstone

Nagu Mieha

SOUP DISK SOUP 001 CD

Montage

Anthropologie

SOUP DISK SOUP 003 CD

Various Artists

Silverstonation 2

SOUP DISK SOUP 002 CD

Fleis with the bosphorus bulft of its doped-up sensibility, downtown beat collage — the genre that sees itself as the ultimate in slacker cool — is probably more concerned with control than any other form of pop music in living memory, especially so on these three CDs from Japan's Soup Disk label. At least there was supposed to be a bit of a throb in Prog rock's virtuosity and the inhuman precision of punk funk had a political purpose. Down tempo, on the other hand, seems to avoid excitement, overload, ecstasy, electricity, sex and mayhem at all costs. Instead, the musicians are content to wallow in their disengagement, calculation and restraint. That

said, why does this stuff seem to have so much less to say than Béla, Chetnik or Thomas Körner who along preps similar lines?

The steady timbres on Silverstone's *Nagu* Mieha offer some clues. Basically comprised of toy piano lines from the *Exorcist* or "London Bridges" and one-note string riffs over the top of rigid beats, Nagu Mieha is so lightweight that it would be tossed aside with a single flick from DJ Premier's musical wits. Windham Hill had better watch out, the George Winston of the 90s leisure class has arrived.

Where Silverstone attempt to patch through a cod Zen simplicity, Montage try to camouflage through over-conceptualisation. They talk a good game, the packaging goes on about "documentary collage from metatextual life facts", the song titles range from "Photographic Discord" to "Dig Up The Melody", and, guess what, they've read *Burroughs' Onezone Of The City College*?

What that means of course, is lackadaisical beats underneath some very brief jazz ("A Night In Tunis") and Hopkins ("Microphone Friend") samples over-processed Huddle Eastern horn sounds and a general bloodless pell-mell. Music is supposed of everything but the most parched drum beats and dried-out bass sound on Silverstonation 2 & compilation of Soup artists and likeminded compatriots such as DJ Vadim. Unsurprisingly, with Vadim in the area, rigor mortis is in full effect. Silverstonation is all about annihilation and depletion, making it the most interesting listen of the three. However, I want this stuff to be murkier than I Roy's bong water, but it's as limp as one of Kitaro's crystals. What kind of crap do these guys smoke?

PETER SHAPIRO

George Chisholm, whose tolling trombone enlivened the "light entertainment" of my childhood. And those associations enrich, rather than impoverish my listening.

Krasnery was composed in 1968. It's a big piece for small orchestra: no percussion, but a dozen strings and 11 wood instruments; plus, crucially, a taped portion which at times all but engulfs the live instruments, at other times seems to merge with them, or even be the sound source from which they grow. Although the sleeve art (by DJ Spooky, who also worked the tape during this live performance by The ST-X Ensemble under conductor Charles Zacharie Bernstein) is more intriguing than informative, it does quote Xenakis, who suggests that the "biological tumult" and social transformation wrought by imminent population explosion provided a "founding perspective which underlined the composition of Krasnery".

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NICK KIMBERLEY



muscularity, relying more on a throwaway vagueness. "I never fall apart because I never fall together," they draw offhandedly on "Europa", and "Yawn in a Roman way" becomes an anthem.

"Macromassa" have all the vinegar that Tancredi lacks, if a little lugubrious at times. Puerto Rican rhythms strain to evade a dark Batata-like poesy, like some unwholly tribute to the perversions of Heligobalus, high priest of Baal, third century Roman Emperor, and self-made solar god. Victor Nuba and Juan Gómez have mastered a group that can weld clarinet, flute, sax, guitar and assorted horns over pounding drum beats, as well as masterfully a way of keeping their Spanish lyrics like watertight buds. Tracks such as "La Estrella De España. De Nubes Y Flechas" compare a dark sludge struggle fire with thick malevolent brass. The feel of storm clouds gathering brings with it the possibility of screeching guitars and horns. Sax, horns and bashing synth on "Puerto" create a heavy rhythmic groove, a brasier version of Miles Davis's hallucinatory broodings of the 70s. "Cubo-Amidar" dispenses a furious free jazz jam on cello, drums and organ, while the sole track rounds up the flutes, sax, clarinet, celo and guitar in mocking desecry, an elegy to Heligobalus splendour. The constant return to song form keeps this more like a hot-breathed Visigoth rock than Last Exit or God, but some non lyrical tracks open up proceedings — the discursive loops of brass on "Legana Es Su Luz", like some archaic trance music, or the blaring dissonant fanfares on "Dormitorio".

PAUL FRITH

Tosca

Opera
6-STONE G-STONE 002 CO

Fila Brazillia

Luck Be A Weendo Tonight
PORK RECORDINGS PORK 045 CO

Baby Mammoth

One Two Freak
PORK RECORDINGS PORK 044 CO

The whole notion of chit chat seems to be a refusal of the possibility that meaning or intention resides in music — a way for the artist to deny any responsibility or avoid making any effort. Of course it's symptomatic of the times, but that doesn't make it any more compelling. Two of these discs represent possible escape routes, while the last epitomise the inevitable, total numbness that chit chat generates.

Tosca, a collaboration between Vienna's Richard Dorfmeier and Rainer Huber, pretty much follow the standard downtown path of abstract Ho-Ho-Ho — lay beats, filtered samples and non sequiturs. However, their between-the-best-spaces are more affecting than the usually anorexic chambers of Tropico's quasi-dub layovers. Their meanderings through the urban underbelly are anchored with more live bass (or live bass samples) than those of their contemporaries, lending at least an illusion of substance to the record. Opera trespasses on Gavin Bryars' *Arias Blood Never Faded*. Yet territory loquid found sounds whose juxtapositions conjure up clichés of social realism (train streets, sidewalk hustlers, people alone in a crowded, ethnic ghetto, grimy faces, travellers going nowhere, babbling voices) rather than stooped pseudo surrealism.

Instead of gazing over on its smarts, Luck Be A Weendo Tonight transcodes its genius and its title through its musicality. Steve Cobey, the man behind Fila Brazillia and the one who provides the bulk of the music from the Pork set, seems destined to release more albums that Johnny Cash by the time he's 35. Typically for someone with too many ideas, Luck Be A Weendo Tonight is a distillation of disco house lounge jazz touchiness, Balkan swash and Emo-style eggedheadness. There's even some space rock chthonia (guaranteed to piss off the purists) on 'Van Allen Belt', while "Billy Goat Groups" is a collision between Prog excess and Steptoeation stomp. There are times when the record tries too hard to be pretty, but Cobey's attempt to wed his ass to his head is laudable indeed.

Unlike the very good *Bogging Two Worlds* from earlier this year, Baby Mammoth's One Two Freak is as solid and static a record as you're ever likely to hear. Most Pork records tend to disregard the external world, but their extreme solipsism paradoxically pulls you in. One Two Freak, however, sits around like Hilary's Everest: it's just there. Beats come into view, state their indifference and scurry underneath the prelab, synth

foundation without building any sort of momentum. The spoken word sample on "For Dear Life" gives the game away: this is an album that poors a cocooned desensitisation as basis. However, being dead to your surroundings usually means being dead to your audience.

PETER SHAPIRO

Various

Southern Journey Volume 3: 61 Highway Mississippi
ROUNDER CD 1703 CO

Various

Southern Journey Volume 4
Brethren, We Meet Again
ROUNDER CD 1704 CO

Various

Southern Journey Volume 6
Sheep, Sheep Don'tcha Know The Road
ROUNDER CD 1706 CO

Part of an enormous reissue programme — 13 volumes in this series alone and in excess of a hundred from around the world — these field recordings are a remarkable testament to ethnomusicologist Alan Lomax. More importantly, they contain lots of great music.

The Southern Journey series was recorded in the American South of 1959, documenting sacred and secular, instrumental and vocal traditions which were still very much alive; there but either forgotten or co-opted into the music industry elsewhere. Volumes 1, 2, and 5 are devoted to folk and old time music, whereas these focus on blues and spirituals; Volume 3, which comes closest to recovered notions of a blues recording, is a fine introduction. Six of the 24-plus feature Fred McDowell, a classic Delta blues figure in the style of Blind Willie Johnson. His are superb performances, beautifully recorded. Even more valuable are the recordings of less familiar traditions: a life and drum piece based on antiquated blues forms, themselves descended from African rhythms; Hell Hoppers recorded at the notorious Parchman Farm penitentiary; sprouts, work songs and dance music.

VOLUME contains white-spirituals, which may have less of a cache among music aficionados today but are perhaps even more remarkable. In an effort to overcome the difficulties of popularising spirituals among often illiterate congregations, Southern Protestants evolved two distinct traditions: lining hymns and Sacred Harp. In the former a leader feeds the lyrics and melody line by line to the congregation, who reply in protracted keenings with variable emphasis and embellishment. Sacred Harp, by contrast, involves congregations using hymnals which separate notated lines for bass, tenor, and soprano voices, using shape note notation. The complex method produces impassioned performances of a powerful, ethereal beauty.

Other spiritual and gospel traditions are featured, including some truly affecting individual testimonies recorded at religious congregations.

Volume 6, examining expressions of the sacred and the sinful, features Willie Jones's "You Got Dimples In Your Jaws", of which Lomax recalls "On one memorable night in a gambling dive, surrounded by gun toters and hard-headed women, I recorded the bawdy and cry-influenced blues style of the deep South of today." At around the same time John Lee Hooker would record and popularise the same blues as "Dimples". Some 30 years before Fred McDowell committed his version of "Keep Your Lamp Trimmed And Burning" to tape for Lomax, Blind Willie Johnson had recorded his. But the performances for Lomax are superb, beautifully recorded and evidently heartfelt, richly contextualised here as treasures of an American culture not yet in thrall to mass mediation. Collectively they show your copy of *The Complete Robert Johnson* to be about as definitive a document of American roots culture as a single piece of a jigsaw puzzle.

TM OWN

Various Artists

Spunk Jazz
ILLILLCO 001 CO 2LP

In the Mark Twain novels, Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn, on the run from parents and authorities, are reduced to drinking "spunk water" from an old tree stump. This liquid (causing not a few youthful classroom titters) was unevaporated, stagnant (ewwww). Do you smell a metaphor yet? This compilation reveals a marginal backwater of experimental blues/country blues that's been growing, like a jungle creek, whose ecology has been left unrunrigged, not undisturbed by human or beast, in towns like Brighton, Cambridge and Coventry.

Some of the stuff is more of a blunt instrument than a cutting edge. Spunk Jazz sounds the clarion call to a bedroom bound nation: "What you're doing, it's all perfectly natural and healthy, guys — go with the flow!" This music runs like the clappers, flowing along like a runaway train, about to go off the rails — check "Fat Dog (12 O'Clock)" by Come On, Feel the Nothing, or Value Ape's "Old School Knee Clicker" a perfect soundtrack for a speed up film of human behaviour jerks, twitches, incurables and all. "F.Y.A." by Animals On Wheels (aka Andy Collymore, recently picked up from Brighton's Bonvini label by Ninja Tune) is a playful scrap in which a miserable hi-hat sample, a furiously pedalling Rhodes piano and wim-wim guitar all end up with scuttled knees as a voice shouts "Wonder!, Verti", "Tense And Leaning", sounds like a drab '71 bass remix of a 1973 Weather Report ja. Titles such as "Deny Great Malice" by Bubblefish's Fumi and "The Ballad Of Terry Ping" (by Milky Bay) point to British eccentric

MENTION CHEAP RECORDS,
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Group Accounts Face-UP on Polydor 71141-90 and Island Discographies on ISDI 00122 04300 222 0392

Described by NICKY HORN

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Reckitt & Colman Ltd.

soundcheck

humor in the mould of Monty Python and The Bonzo Dog Doo Dah Band. There's even an 'artist' called Paddington Brooks — his "Scare Pers" riffs on the kind of building site noises that will likely have putative-minded citizens on the phone to the council. This is the devil's own therapy.

BOB YOUNG

Various Artists

Unknown Deutschland — The Krautrock Archive Volume 2
VIRGIN CONDO 412 CD

Various Artists

Unknown Deutschland — The Krautrock Archive Volume 3
VIRGIN CONDO 413 CD

The controversy that surrounded the release of Volume 1 of this series (is whether the artists featured were genuine German space rockers from the period or merely Julian Cope-inspired 90s wannabes) will undoubtedly ring a note now that these final pieces of the mysterious Pyramid label's puzzle have been located and slotted together. Although the sleeve notes to both these excellent samples give only the simplest information regarding the origins of the featured groups, simply listening will confirm beyond doubt that this is the real stuff and not some wild amateurish prank.

If further proof were needed, unfold the booklet inside Volume 3 and gaze in awe at the tiny cover reproduction of the Nagual's one and only album. A faceless, cloaked day figure stands against a backdrop of abstract shadows; the group's name crudely spelled out in shivers of white paper. The end result is too primitive and representative of The Nagual's unearthly Prog drome sound to be fake. "The Dead March" on Volume 2 and "The Tower Of Barad-Dur" on Volume 3 are unlike any other German rock music you'll ever hear. Both elongated tracks drift out of the speakers like some kind of alien gas slowly intruding the senses to tease the listener breathless and slightly dazed. Being drab happens, The Nagual decided to call themselves after their favourite characters from Tolkien's *Lord Of The Rings*. They'd have done better to name themselves after something from pulp horror/fantasy fiction writer Clark Ashton Smith's collected works, a creator of lost worlds who would have immediately recognized the dead star where this lot were coming from.

Elsewhere there are fine-freelecting guitar and analogue synth workouts from Golem, Cosmic Corridors, Temple (all of whom were featured on Volume 1), Spaciana, Ten To Zen, Chronos and Boat, together with Neil Anderson's "Feuerwerk" which erupts into a cascading shower of overlapping, treated instrumentation, including a drunkenly manipulated sputterbox. As even a cursory earl inspection of these collections reveals,

the Pyramid label was home to a veritable army of free spirits.

EDWIN POUNCEY

Vienna Art Orchestra

Tango From Obongo

EXTRALIPLATINER 10-2 3CD

Tango From Obongo, a limited edition set, reissues previously available recordings, with some emphasis on the packaging: instead of a cryptic jewel-case you get a sturdy cardboard box holding Tango From Obongo (1979), a slip-case containing Two Songs For Another War (1988) plus Jesus No! and Kontrapunkter from 1977, and a sampler featuring 13 Extraterrestrial aribs in an ingenious canistered cover. All this and good music, too.

By the 70s the notion of the big band may have faded from saudade lands (and if you really wanted a big sound why not call it a few more effects on your synth?) but orchestral jazz was in rude health. Projects like Gute Unry, Cadena Nova Danca, Mike Westbrook's Concert Band, The Brotherhood Of Breath, The Willem Breuker Kollektief, The LICO, The JCOA, Hiv Gibbs' groups, George Russell's orchestra, Pierre Dorge's New Jungle Orchestra and George Gruntz's Concert Jazz Band illustrated the vigour and variety available to imaginative composers and arrangers.

Mathias Ruigg's Vienna Art Orchestra just sort of grew. Ruigg engaged as a solo pianist at a nightspot, kept meeting additional musicians to jam with him. Eventually he dropped out as a performer, leaving the keyboard to Uri Scherzer, though there's a brief example of Ruigg playing on the Obongo disc. In an interview with Francis Davis during the VAD's 1985 American tour Ruigg explained that The VAD's "style and philosophy of composition" derives from European music, but "it's jazz in that the writing is a vehicle to encourage individual expression".

Ruigg has often been criticised for adopting surprise as his primary tactic. These days unusual juxtapositions are the norm (only releases and radio stations worry about rigid categorisation) but Tango shows there was some truth in the accusation at the start: Ruigg's musicality is Galician and *The World Of BiBand And BiGobo* pivots on a mélange of cut-ups from Billington, Garner, Monk, Gillespie and the pastiches in Songs are less obvious, and the music is less orchestral, but it remains Ruigg's claims about empowering the soloists. He uses the full group is sparing, much of the time he focuses on part of the Art, but the ensemble's apposite interventions prod and incite effectively. The first song demonstrates Ruigg's economical but felicitous way with texture, achieving richness without lushness. Both discs contain a wealth of well shaped but intense playing from remendous Harry Peppi and Wolfgang Puschning.

BARRY WITHERHORN

John Wall

Fractur

METABOLISM 3 CD

John Wall invites comparison with David Shek as a composer who works by sampling direct from other musical sources. However, whereas Shek makes a point of dismembering the cultural associations of his samples into collaged cinematic narratives, Wall takes a completely opposite turn, using digital technology to homogenise sonic textures from many sources into a coherent aesthetic.

The four pieces on Wall's third CD Fractur include (usually unrecognisable) quotes from, in one corner: Evan Parker, John Zorn, Dave Holland, Swans, Ryoko Koike, David Tippins, and in the other: Cage, Henze, Penderecki, Brwinski, Ligeti, Lutoslawski, Webern, Stockhausen, Xenakis and Nono. Though this may sound like a showdown between the forces of avant-garde and modernist composition, Wall is primarily interested in dismantling and reconfiguring the shared tonal materials and intensities of both to extract an overarching soundscape embracing purity and noise, in fact given that a piece by any of the above is texturally rich enough to have provided all of the sounds for the pieces here, the use of the fragments seems almost like a ritual drinking of the blood of the sound gods to empower Wall's modernist superchild.

As you'd expect from the materials the resulting pieces are highly intense, angular, and contrapuntal. However there's also a meditative dimension to Wall's approach. It's as if, through listening to the spiky extensivity and percussive disruptions of minimalist, post-serialist and Cagean music, he's imbibed its sonic textures without its methods, and reproduced the sounds as part of an intuitive emotional project — halfway between composition and Improv.

The 20-minute Fractur recalls Stockhausen and Boulez in its opening piano snaps, aiming at impossible points of presence, fused with drones, finger clicks and Evan Parker's guttural sin harmonics. The pieces are full of percussive patterns foiled by rebusious microtonal gestures (from Penderecki? Or Xenakis?) The sputtery strings, pops of electronic noise, abrasive dots and signs of sound are the equivalent of the abstract art's artifice.

The drive towards an unmediated purity of sound events — free from the middle tones and logic of subjective lyricism — taps into an austere vein of modernist sublimity (not so incongruously, the minimalist CD packaging recalls that of Joy Division's Soft Cell's chosen songs) are all high, shimmering harmonics and prancing about bass — throughout all the pieces he has made extensive use of improvised responses to the work in progress by Peter Sheppard (violin) and John Edwards (double bass).

"Satis" recalls the ghost of Webern in its exploration of string textures — heavily sizzled gut, high fiddle strings, sudden plucks and harmonics transmute into an atonal string quartet before breaking up into a soft run of tiny sound fragments. "Dial" again pits scurrying weeding violin against a more rhythmic slapping bass, while "Untitled 3" paces the bass and violin against shall-tie trilling, long droning screeches and Cagean silence.

MATT PITTACHE

Wu Man And Ensemble

Chinese Traditional And Contemporary Music

METABOLISM MS417 CD

Fong Naam

Jazz/Asian Music From New Siang

METABOLISM MS418 CD

Wu Man has recorded with Bill Laswell and The Kronos Quartet among others. She plays a pipa, or plucked lute, and is here accompanied by a chamber group who play zheng (plucked others), erhu and gaohu (bowed lutes), and dan, suo (flute) and suona (shoam). As the instrumentation suggests, the ensemble has a keen respect for the Chinese silk and bamboo, or some style of traditional heterophony. As with other traditional musics, an adoption by academics has paralleled a fall from popular grace, and it's due to ensembles such as this to maintain a love for the beauty of traditional forms alongside an awareness of modern innovations. The disc features traditional pieces, such as "Kao Yu'an Zhou", which is heard here in a solo version for pipa from a score dating back to 1818, as well as three recent compositions, notably "C-A-G-E" a dedication to John Cage by Tan Dun (composer of the soundtrack to the Hong Kong handover), and of Ghost Opera, which Wu Man recently recorded with the Kronos Quartet. This is a more accessible collection than her earlier Nimbus disc.

The petite (percussion) ensemble Fong Naam's The Sleeping Angel is a fine introduction to the classical music. Seven fine The musicians are led by Boey Wong Kar Kong, a master of the er-hu, or the yehohku, but attention tends to focus on eighth member Bruce Gaston, a California Buddhist whose "Ode Praya Concerto", featured here elicited a caty response from a restive audience at the 1995 Proms. This master Gaston has long been a devotee of this music, and he has generally oriented into the ensemble playing a gong circle. His concerto, however, illustrates the ensemble's intention to "create a bridge between the old past and the present", incorporating Western classical idioms to push the bounds of traditional music.

It isn't the most remarkable achievement in New Music, being too reminiscent of the conservatoire, but it succeeds on its own terms and is only one element in the repertory of this remarkable ensemble. The closing "Fong Naam" is rather more radical, updating a traditional piece with the looser, jazzier elements of Gaston's piano. Fong Naam should be applauded for their dedication to a living tradition.

TRIM SWINN

in brief

electronica

Reviewed by Rob Young

Aedena Cycle

Albite (earservice) 85 CD 013 CD

Three years ago, Aedena Cycle were part of that interesting first wave of Norwegian Ambient — alongside Biosphere and Sketch — to be picked up by the fast-conscious Belgian R&S label. Now key member Gauje Barinbaugus is back solo on a homogenous imprint, but the time away has been used well.

"Orange Basalt" is a pretty amble through Ambient fields of swing, but most of the rest is broader. "Blank" contains distant, muffled tribal tolling drums. "Prestozen" is lifted from the mark by keeping high register organ and, again, those double-time drotos from the mid valley but one. Sounds like Isolationist's permablast is on the melt.

Bearhead

Beardhead (earservice) 85 CD 013 CD

Composer Hondo Michael Reimbold finally drops a full-length record by his own Bearhead outfit. His take on heavy analogue synth funk yields a fertile root crop. The Moog bassline of "Planetary Deadlock" tuners through treble vocal words like tubes sizzling under the sol, while the phantom note-clusters that run through tracks such as "Did You Know (The Truth)" and the Junglist "Code Of Confidence" sounds like the trophies of a quest for a magical sonic elixir. Elsewhere, double basses, Pharoah Sanders-style jingling percussion and overdriven clement keep the mood loose and spontaneous.

Exhaustor

Coaxial (luna alternativa) 040 CD

MSB Electrons At Work inc.

00000110 CD

Two deep electronic depth soundings, with Spanish connections. Exhaustor has dropped up in these pages before as Orfeo Gagnon — the work of Miguel Ruiz. Coaxial is echo-

chamber trance, reminiscent of the Far label's fair — and more rhythmic — moments. Nice work if you can find it.

HSB finds Spanish Dark Ambience Seviro Evangelista moonlighting from his day job as a member of Espíndola Geométrico, in this collaboration with Roman producer Mauroo Marteau. Difficult to be sure, but there's an apparent lack of calculation throughout that makes me think it's improved from their personal libraries of sounds: "awakening/dreamtime anthems" is a "Sam Isamu" for unspiritual soloists, with some beautiful Moog playing and a stereo-enhanced bass raga. A project that gains much from isolationist circumstances.

Higher Intelligence Agency & Pete Namlook

SEADAO 004 PW 24 CD/PW

Ladies and gentlemen, we are floating in space. Hondo Ben — Birmingham's Higher Intelligence Agency — does with Captain Namlook's motherhood and together they blast off hunting for signs of alien life. Now that Fax releases are fewer and further between than before, Namlook's experience of Amibient there is fully intact on the weightless crime of "Secret Location" and the long, suspended animation intro to "Skydive". It's sounding better and better. HIA's rhythmic nervous system doesn't harm matters either. "Intruder Detector" has a Studio One (Perry vintage) loop driving it, while "Skydive's" driving section features a rocket-assisted Saharan rhythm.

Pacou

Symbolic Language 00000000 CD

Heavy-duty 4/4 electronics from Berlin. On the after-shock from the explosion of interest in the Chan Reagon label, the enigmatic Pacou dives deep into the pulsing soul of German

Techno. Most of his grooves, in fact, pack a firmer punch than say, the recent Vangelis release his track is to nicely set the drums yammering hard. "Their Voices" is amazing: more than four and a half minutes of a strange ratcheting sound resembling someone hauling up a particularly rusty anchor.

Q-Moog

The Arc Of Bluegrass 00000000 19110 CD

There's an intensity about Q-Moog's debut. "For me, this album is the forever search for the true meaning of what it is to be a human being," the man known only as Green writes on the cover. One thing's clear: this was not recorded on expensive equipment, which makes it unusual for an album coming out of Detroit (apart from Green, African and Aboriginal origins, counts Xan Adams among his mentors). There are fine moments of silicon soul here. "All My Love" skates across a thin ice of percussion on the edge of cracking. "Mirabilis" kicks off with an ill Hayes soundalike breathing sultry words too close to the mic, vocals on the promiscuously titled "Egyptian Night Flight" are taken by a backwards descendant of Faruq. Recommended for its peculiar production values alone — the whole thing sounds like it's coming out of a latened yule, or belching from a car stereo half a mile away.

Björn Svin

Mer Strom 00000000 CD

Ari Smoo Fruit Of The Loop 00000000 2052 CD

Two young European guys offering quirky spins through their private virtual worlds. 21 year old Dane Björn Svin's CD is all angular edges and hi-energy beats. "No Space", with its drawled post-adolescent vocal, is reminiscent of the New York robo-House perpetuated on Khan's "Bad Computer Bed", the rest, especially "Feel The Monads", is just the right side of banjax.

An (pronounced 'Ar-Jay') Smoo is a precocious 16 year old with a penchant for dismantling the shabbiest of disco clichés. There is a growing taste for this kind of jolly slowed down House approach I find hard to share, unless it's in the hands of masters like

France's Motorbass or the Swiss outfit Bel Air. That said, there's an obvious spirit of experimentation in the young Smoo — at several points he throws the soundfield open to include the sound of the street from his bedroom — that might lead to a more rounded music, in the fullness of time.

Starfish Pool

Dame's Carnival 00000000 001 CD

Tom Vediva Butra Spm 00000000 C000 45651 CD

Latest from Belgian outfit Starfish Pool, and boy, does it feel fresh! A few years ago, they were producing one of the better strands of Euro-Ambience on Nova Zembla, but on the pretentiously titled Dame's Carnival they're reduced to plugging jumpy Trance Techno and even — on "Dante's Carnival Act II" — an utterly nonsensical reggae beat. The hour or so spent in their company is pretty esmal.

Tom Vediva is an 'ethno' Ambient 'soundscape' artist hailing from Hermosa Beach, California. One day it will be possible to program CD players to flash warning lights when a disc of that description is inserted. For it's more than likely you're going to find a lot of white-tie feedfod in here. Actually, Sun Ra isn't quite as bad as the worst West Coast expressos — "Screen Gem" is an OK piece of Ambient bust — but it still can't escape the general feeling of dilution — 'real' tabla and star notwithstanding.

Paul W Teekrooke

Connections 00000000 001 CD

As his alter-ego Stasis, Steve Pickton has played a central role in the area of Brash Techno that centred around The Black Dog, Mark Broom, and labels like Hot Wax, B12, Peacefrog and Luminex. Perplexingly monikered for its excellent solo venture on Kirk Degregori's Op-Art Label, Connections is his best so far. Pickton has a gorgeous way with keyboard writing, and his floating, quivering chord shapes shimmer behind his remarkably inventive rhythms, constructed from sampled jazz drummers and intense machine. A genuinely individual and strong voice in a field where abstraction is often a substitute word for lack of substance. □



in brief new jazz

Reviewed by Andy Hamilton

Aardvark Jazz Orchestra

Pealines And Elegies LDR 008 CD
Its name gets it to the top of the column, though for once the moronic question "But is it jazz?" has some point. Mark Haney has been running his Boston-based orchestra off and on for over 20 years, and this live CD is their second on Leo. There's not a lot of jazz groove in the 76 minutes of mostly mournful tributes and elegies, and the orchestration owes as much to Charles Ives as Ellington and Gil Evans. The singing's a bit "classical" too ("Don Cherry's Book Of Beauty" eventually gets into a Latin feel, but "Other Angels/Other Voices" stays resolutely in choral mode. Solos tend not to be too memorable — or well-known — but it's a brave and unusual venture.

Lol Coxhill/George Haslam

Sodas East/West sum 306 cd
From Kirov Step, Ukraine, to East Stratford, London — solo sax from Haslam on tour and Coxhill at home. Haslam's warm, breathy baritone is heard on a mix of standards and originals — Leonard Bernstein's "Somewhere" must be a favorite; it was also on the recent Haslam-Holm duo album (also on SLAP!). Haslam's relaxed approach builds to a passionate intensity on Blington's "It Don't Mean A Thing," and the near-sound of tarotago — a Hungarian folk instrument that's a cross between oboe and clarinet — is telling on his own "Speculo." Coxhill's is quirky sell and very much lo-fi on the 23-minute "Incongruous" — a private live recording presumably by that eminent sound engineer Sonny Walerman.

Marty Ehrlich/Ben Goldberg

Light At The Crossroads sonetts 521 151 CD
Ubiquitous canner and sax player Marty Ehrlich — here restricting himself to clarinet and bass clarinet — teams with Ben Goldberg on the same instruments. In a mostly topless set of originals by the two players, the possibilities of tonal contrast are explored with wit and imagination. Trevor Dunn on bass and Kenny Wollesen on drums are equal voices in the argument. The serious "I Don't Know The World Without Don Cherry" is one of several recent Cherry tributes while "Dark Sesame" unwinds beautifully into a minor blues. One of Ehrlich's best recent efforts.

Four 80 East

The Album sonetts 5001 001 CD
The publicity lets this as jazz-funk and

comes with recommendations for FM airplay, but it's several steps on from 70s fusion. Four 80 East, from Toronto, features Rob Deacon on bass and programming and Tony Grace on drums, with an additional guitar and trumpet, and saxophone from Jon Stewart. They've mixed fusion with the trance-like repetitions of Ambient Techno, and the result shouldn't be mistaken for nano-groove as top quality audio wallpaper. There's a sophisticated layering of textures and some inspired transitions, for instance to the haunting melodic codas on "Buzz." This music often transcends its aspirations.

Kankawa B-III

Three Jazz musicians have been trying to appropriate Jimi Hendrix since Miles Davis was poised to record with him (see the Alan Douglas story, "Jimi The 161"). Hendrix may not have known what a diminished chord was, but he played them (see Miles' autobiography), and contrast the usual defensive hostility of rock musicians towards "jazzy chords." Harmonic complexity and, more importantly, mastery of the blues, make Hendrix's connection with jazz a tantalizing issue. Gil Evans arranged Hendrix compositions with some success, and now Japanese Harmonium organ maestro Kankawa creates what he calls a "hard rock jazz setting," in company with ex-Gil Evans players such as trumpeter Lee Snoff and atheist Dan Sanborn. Sadly, much sound and fury end doggy vocals relegate this to the "terrac-titure" category.

Uwe Oberseß/Gregor Wolf/Jörg Fischer

Collective 1st Circus 010 010 010 CD
Ten reference points for Leo are Paul Bley and Ceci Taylor — fitting with the trio's aim to play "pushing earthy music, as well as soar up in spheres of choice fragility," as they say. Uwe Oberseß is on piano, Georg Wolf on bass and Jörg Fischer on drums. The trio, based in the Cologne area, was formed in 1994. The word "lu" seems to have some Zain significance and all the titles begin with those letters, except "Vivid, Intense" and "Vivid, Intense II" for solo piano. There's a sense of form, and each piece is an individual creation. "Loco" exploits a remarkable range of percussion sonorities, while "Lottosome" comes across like one of Paul Bley's dark ruminations, with soft sounds like prepared piano. Two solo piano pieces are Impressionist pastels shadings. Thoughtful and impressive.

Oberseß is more in Ceci Taylor's soundworld,

but with episodes of tender repose. Collective 4tet are Jeff Hoyer (trombone), Park Heine (sax), Heinz Gesser (percussion) and William Parker (bass). Parker is Cecil Taylor's bassist of choice, Gesser, from Zurich, is the only non-American "star" suited to a towering intensity over its 13 minutes. It's surrounded by more restrained interludes — "Boat" is a brief, gentle trombone/vocal duet, "Iris" is brooding, impressionistic night music. The long title track displays the bassist's mastery of arco technique. A fine representative of William Parker's "post-Trane tradition."

Sherri Roberts

Twilight World emeritiae 88 1604 00 CD
Debut album by Roberts, a young singer based in the Bay area, with excellent backing from Mark Solon (piano), Harvey Svard (bass) and Jeff Hamilton (drums). She knows how to interpret the carefully considered and often unusual standards in her programme. Her singing is deliberate, behind the beat yet intensely swinging, the rich delivery reminds me of Helen Merrill, Gil Evans's favorite vocalist. Highlights include "I Remember You," maybe better known in Frank Lloyd's version than Charlie Parker's — here the great lyrics by Johnny Mercer are beautifully rendered. An excellent album and a new talent to look out for.

AnneMarie Roniols' Waste

Watchers Music From The Land Of Milk And Honey vico 044 CD
Homler/Wagenaem/Fait
Corso: De Vacche vico 047 CD
Two live recordings from the Musique Actuelle Festival, Victoria. Corso: De Vacche is a captivating album, featuring Anna Homler (vocals, "troupe voices"), Geert Wagenaem (keyboards, mandolin, violin) and Peter Fajt (percussion), with guest Koan Van Roy on sax. Why and obscure, the jerky, mechanical feel of many of the pieces calls to mind a world where toys come alive, as in Beatrix Potter's *Coppelia* and Disney's *enchanted*. Other tracks are more footloose in feel, and spare but telling use of electronics produces some delightful effects. An absolute gem.

AnneMarie Roniols' album is not so convincing. An eclectic, post-free improv setting of a story about three pants who escape from captivity in a rubbish heap, pursued by a vicious cat, who after various adventures, you know the kind of thing "Weel" and "Sally" are words that come to mind. Roniols plays trombone, trumpet and ear trumpet (of course), with Johannes Kramer on electric guitar and live electronics, and Dirk Mandersloot on saxes. With lots of brulee calls, animal noises and chase sequences, I guess it's meant to be amusing.

Salt/Vu Ragged Jack

CD
A standout feature of the superlative album — led by pianist Jamie Saft and trumpeter Cuong Vu — is the drumming of Jim Black. He gives the tight sound of the quartet its cutting edge, driving it without the assistance of bass or base guitar. Black and Andrew D'Angelo — here on alto sax and bass clarinet — were together in the highly innovative New York Feel. The lock step rhythms are a sonic signature of the downtown New York school, but there's softy impressionistic playing too. Salt and Vu are new to me, but their compositions are open and refreshing, the combination unusual and challenging. Strongly recommended.

The South African Exiles

Thunderbird heros 00 CD
There's not too much on record by the marvelous musicians brought together by South African pianist Chant McGregor. In exile in London, he founded the legendary big band Brotherhood Of Breath in 1970. This ebullient live recording from 1986 features a smaller aggregation, the great Joning Dyale on bass, Dudu Pukwana on alto and Harry Beckett on trumpet, but with Gillett Matthews on drums instead of Louis Moholo. The recorded sound isn't spellbinding, and the full group is featured on only half the tracks, including the poignant Harry Beckett ballad "Chandeleur And Mirrors". But there are excellent solo piano and piano/bass duet interpretations of the McGregor compositions "Balawethu" and "You And Me." There's an uncredited guitarist involved, probably Lucy Korku. Today all the original South African exiles featured on this recording are dead — a terrible indictment of the physical and mental anguish caused by apartheid.

Wisdom Tooth

Mental Floss eating factory wifer 141 CD
I thought mental floss was the stuff Stan Laurel pulled internally from ear to ear to annoy Oliver Hardy. Turns out it's also one very scary album by a noise group from Austin, Texas who play primal neo-industrial electronics perverted blues (it says here). Stephen Marsh on electric guitar, Ed Greer on bass and David Lipsky on drums also use an array of metal objects including gas cans, saw blades and oil drums, plus a human skull. Marsh's occasional weird vocals are distorted through a Green Bullet humerica microphone, he begins by telling us, "The meat solo is a low-down dirty blues, the sort of thing you rarely hear played at a Girl Scout camp." But these are distant reminiscences of the issues the packhammer beat maybe originates with. Muddy Waters's stop-beat maybe originated with "Hoochie-Coochee Man." Very dark, noisy and mindblowing — listening right through at full volume could prove fatal. □

in brief outer limits

Reviewed by Biba Kopf

Jack Arel Dance & Mood Music

VINYL CD/CV2831 CO

In the 60s the TV testcard served as the Trojan horse that smuggled odd musical hybrids into suburban front rooms. But for what did Frenchman Arel secure complete artistic control from his music library paymasters? Answer: the right to engineer plaque-like modern music to make those Tupperware parties go with a swing. When he did exercise his contractual freedom he managed to produce something other than jazzed R&B Music, like the electronically enmeshed "Picture Of Spring".

Aube Started Gleam les yeux ouverts

Aube's Akhura Nakajima usually supplies the sources of his intriguing juxtapositions of noise — more often than not they're slurring body sounds and beats picked up by medical recording equipment. This time round he offers no cues; his pieces accrue around strings of silence. Crystalline sounds gradually come into earshot, and slowly harden into dense gleaming knots of noise capable of repelling anything Nakajima applies to it; it's piercingly high taser pitches or drooping DNA corrodes. If Nakajima is not actually dealing in raw nerve this time, he still touches one.

Band Of Pain You're Mess

FORTUNE IRS-001 CO

Controlled Bleeding The

Poisoner SO-0000H 50.33 CO

Takes on darkside Ambient. Band Of Pain is Steve Pitts plus a little help from family and friends. His music pitches itself somewhere between the academics — Stockhausen's *Gesang Der Junglinge* is referenced, Cage's silent offering 4'33" is assayed — and the factory floor. Veteran sulks Controlled Bleeding have drownd through so many different post-industrial permutations, it'd be easy to dismiss them as clichés. That is, if they didn't periodically turn out discs as good as The Poisoner's grimly evocative indictment of the polluters of the world's petrified forests.

Coil Unnatural History III

WIESEL 100 12 CO

The deeper Coil dig into their archives the wider the gong gets, though the music for commercials sectors — previously available on the Hefner themes 10" — is absent; only infarct as far as it really did help coil consumer dreams. Elsewhere they scattered their most hallucinatory tracks across a series of hard-to-find limited edition singles

and compilations: "Baby Food", street slang for Resonance, is pulled from a Sub Rosa disc and is an accurate electronic transcription of drug induced Jeffification as you can get without a prescription. Lovelier and no less inventive is the mapping of subterranean currents that is "Lost Rivers Of London". Col arcano at its most evocative and exploratory

Andy Haas Arthrem Land

AVIA 041 CO

According to Heile's sleeve notes, Arthrem Land is what Dutch musicians christened Australia in 1623. Himself a resident of New Amsterdam (ie NYC), his remorseless geographical connection is presumably Haas's justification for taking up didgeridoo, on which he conjures up-industrial sounds for a series of transnational dues. Like Mon programs busy, art-like patterns around his core drone, Anthony Coleman holds up organ simulations to it; Fred Frith's guitar stridently against the didgeridoo with a ferocity that ignites, while Kevin Han and Makigami Koch separately mirror-invert its pitch. Cyro Baptista's percussion songs ferment Has to take the instrument beyond its usual limits.

Hatchan Harobari HACCA-NONE HACC

1001 CO

Sleaze Art Illumination Rounda

VICE SCHALLPLATTEN V1 CO

Two attractive packages. Hatchan's disc comes in a hand-made black box made of a white silicate, with beaten prints and pics of the city at night. The booklet's synopses sketches a city alive with neon signs. And Hatchan's music, struck, bowed and scraped from various electronic, stringed and percussion instruments, mirrors its shifting shapes with the kind of skill that made the Brozhood soundtrack such a queer delight. French mixed guitar and bass ensemble Sleaze Art mail-order-style is folded inside a vortex of the combi, and the sleeve is the jiffy bag it arrives in. Supplying more moves than Branca or Chatham, SA's inexorable forward roll is sustained through the massing of forces which simultaneously crack down hard on circular riffs.

Larry Kuchars Metachordal

VARIOUS INTERNATIONAL AUDIOCHROME IACB03

An American computer composer, Kuchars electronically stacks choral sounding parts into cathedral harmonies that raise the music heavensward. The sound is not unlike that produced by an organ stop, or a mellotron, even. The music rises and falls like a pall of mist in a Werner Herzog mountain film. It

doesn't carry the spiritual import of Popol Vuh's soundtracks, Kuchars's music is scarcely less gorgeous.

Mee Mee

PICTURE PICTURES

There's more to Mee than mei mei mei self promotion, though from her half naked sleeve portrait through her branding Me on everything she touches she does her best to convince otherwise. Using ethnic instruments, violin and guitar, plus field recordings from India and Nepal, she has styled an atmospheric traveleque interspersed with loose songs whose sense of space accurately conveys the shifts in consciousness the pieces describe. And just when it gets a little too New Age, she introduces some sansuous element that totters in a different dimension.

Merzbow Space Metalizer

AUSTRIA 001 CO

Billy? Plays Funny Moods

FUNNY 001 CO

Incapacitants Asset Without Liability

EMI 840 80000 CO

The success of Japanese noise stems from a misunderstanding that equates Merzbow's combination of weird sex and sexual assault with the myth of Japanese extremism. His discography is way out of proportion to the shit ideas it contains. In truth, his imagined cultural transgression is like that of salarymen who read SH! comics while rubbing themselves against women crowded Tokyo trains. That Sosei Metalizer contains more sonic interest than its predecessors is less noteworthy than Merzbow's impact on ideas like Billy?, who consider it cool to promote their noise output with an image of a trussed woman. Incapacitants are not so easily pigeonholed. Their densely textured electronics are like a speeded up city film. Surf the energy flows of light circulating its thoroughfares and tip on their overloads of sound and image.

David Toop/Max Eastley New

And Rediscovered Instruments

VIAS 001 CO/PVCO 001 CO

A welcome 1975 release from Brian Eno's pre-Ambient Obscure label. Because it was partially set up as aural evidence that ideas that looked good on paper did really work, Cliché's disc often served better as laboratory proof than as home listening. But this one's a pleasure to listen to. Watermarks are a common theme here. Eastley's pieces are named for the sound sculptures that source his delicate sonic constructs: the hydrophone, metallocipone and canteenpipe. Loop breaks the ice with a comic song before pitting into the unashamedly beautiful tonal explorations of "The Division Of The Bowhead Whale" for his electric guitar and bowed chordophone backed with bass, fiddle and various percussion objects.

Various Artists Land Of The

Rising Noise Vol. 2 CHANNEL MUSIC

CHCD23 CO

Various Artists Balls To The Wall

MAGNETA 001 65 CO/3213 CO

Though still only volume two, Channel Music's Rising Noise series documenting the Japanese underground has already outgrown its title. It's far more varied than its glib pup suggests. It ranges from Det Esserrost's restoration of early Neubauer metal percussion figures, through the psychedelic longings of the amazing Shouka and Volcano Dots, to the knockabout, punkinose comedy of Gay and Hell Banana. Perhaps the presence of so many women tips the balance away from sophomore transgression (à la Merzbow) to something that is less pronounced but more genuinely different. Recommended. The Magenta comp's eye-catching nave artwork notwithstanding, this is a less commanding travel of Japan's ruder alternatives. Hard to get carried away by its slurry of anonymous noise, while its known quantities — Cox, Incapacitants and Hell Banana win and without Yoshinori Ostrom — are giving much away here.

Various Artists Régénération

DIGITALISATION/RECEPTION ALLIED DT DIGENREG 123 XD

What with its rusting steel plate fastened to an obtuse black sleeve held together with crosstamped paperbands, the derelict French industrial set collection elegantly is almost impossible to enter. But persevere and you break into a Tarkovsky-like aural reconstruction of its history, replace with ghost echoes of a lost age. The international list of contributors, among them Aube, Ilusion Of Safety and John Watermann, were given a tight brief in the form of soundings taken from the site (which you hear before each track proper) and a four-minute time limit. Most of them respond well to orders, resulting in that rarity, a themed compilation that amply fulfills its promise.

Vatra

BRONZ STAUPLAAT ST02129 CO

The residue of an inflammatory international art project surveying "the symbolic meaning, the power and masters of fire". Bronz features the work of Dutch and German artists Kees de Groot, Nuri, Stuckenberg and Croatian Ivan Faktor. The sound component — an audio sky of heavy atmospheres, broken up by a static of music and lost voices — is superimposed on images drawn from art history and film. It's never less than fascinating even when it's not always that listenable. But de Groot's "Verleugning" (denial), which resonates an Ernst Busch rendition of前线 Brecht in a charged wilderness of voices simply intoning the German for "German", "conscious" and "consciousness" is as deeply affecting as it is unsettling. □

in brief out rock

Reviewed by Tom Ridge

Amp Perception

CD 0102003 CD

Mizra

CD 0102003 CD

Tomorrowland

Stereoscopic

Scorched Earth 004 CD

Three from Daniel's bliss out series. Amp weigh in with a double CD of four tracks of Ambient soundscapes and occasionally antagonistic guitar noise. It's an impressive piece of improved atmospherics, with the emphasis very much on mood as opposed to structure. The music unfolds gradually, reaching peaks of intensity before subsiding into static, then silence. Mizra aim for a far more vocal brand of space rock, with guitars interlocking over thumping bass and drums, rasing the music to peaks of frenzied riffing. Simple guitar melodies punctuate their meditations, thereby preventing a descent into bludgeoning monotony; however, the music remains pretty much grounded in a psychadelic blues haze mode which ultimately inhibits any attempts to get seriously ardent. Tomorrowland are a far subtler proposition. In place of meat and potato rock rock values, they serve up an undulation of distorted guitars which shimmer with a trance-like intensity, underpinned by deep basslines and washes of analoge sound effects. An album of great charm — simple but effective.

Appliance

Organised Sound

SUNBELT CON SUR BP1 10"

Experimental pieces from the Stetson/Union Wireless school — the Krautrock influence is there but sublimated in the interests of concise songs. "Open" has a rhythmic simile to Can's "Soy," but adds layers of mantra-like vocals, and "Smoker" builds upon a sustained organ chord and choppy, droning guitar. Though they're not exactly slaves to their influences, they have yet to fully develop their own music out of them. This EP catches them at their embryonic stage.

Directions

Echoes SOLISTE

CD 0001 12"

HIM

"Champagne" / "The Focus"

CD 0001 12" CD 0001 12"

With its Torinese connections (chiefly Bundy K. Brown), the Directions' 12" sounds like a post-rock/jazz fusion, but with the emphasis on supple grooves rather than sexual experimentation. "Comments Drit Version" is a gloriously funky, but not temposhifting, and "The Asymmetrical Excursion" follows a similar pattern but with the individual elements more stably highlighted in the mix. HIM's club inspired experimentation on "Changes" is a more daring, layered sound construction multitracked instruments,

echoing bass and percussion and a smothering of churning voices give it a North African flavour before it dissolves into a dub soundscape. "The Focus" is more spiced up, shredding the melody with various edits before cutting out abruptly to make way for a deep bass groove, cavernous beats and gritty guitar.

Einstürzende Neubauten

The NINAAMM! Remastered By

Darkus Hult action 601 CD

In its original form, "NINAAMM!" is the stunning centerpiece of Einstürzende Neubauten's most recent album *End Neu*. Using a rhythm track hammered together from the thuds and thumps of multitracked running motors, it combines the momentum of 70s Krautrock motifs with Neubauten's noise methods to produce, ironically, their most trance-like piece. Playing in the core manner — the admittedly dull phrase "New No Age Advanced Ambient Motor Music Machine" — that drives the track, Darkus rather bafflingly believes the thing will go better with its drivetrain removed. Unsurprisingly, his mass goes nowhere. More deconstructions than remakes, Darkus does reveal something of his inner workings, but elsewhere he obscures the whole with footshuffling rhythm signatures. Stick with the original. (Blaa Kopt)

Electric Company/Fury

Things

The Kaliakim Incident

Vol. 2 TRANCE SYNDICATE TRS 12"

The Electric Company's music is Electronics free from conventional rhythmic moanings and compacted into a busy collage of sound out of which emerges a kind of pattern which in itself constitutes a rhythm of sorts. "Pompe Queen's Love Potemic" uses white noise percussively, interrupting the flow of capital sounds with jarring, angular beats. The Fury Things take things further with a cacophony of fractured beats, and surges of jittery, electronic noise. Music is desored radio transmissions in a sandstorm.

Masashi Kituchi

Sion

casbahmusic 0001 000001 CD

Loose, Ambient pieces of music combining synthesizer, piano and drums with traditional Japanese instruments, particularly the bamboo flute, shakuhachi, played by Masashi Kituchi. Mostly skeletal and spacious in arrangement, Sion is understated, and builds gradually to a fuller sound throughout. The flute tends to dominate and perhaps the most affecting track is "Getu Kou" which is essentially a solo piece for

Kituchi, though the fuller sounding "Kanatu" and "Higan" combine the traditional and modernist elements successfully.

Kreidler

Fechterin

OFF 002 CD

Kreidler continue to amaze with their seamless merging of samples and live playing in deceptively straightforward structures. "Shimmer" is built around a tick-tock electronic loop bolstered by a live rhythm section, "Shiver" achieves a paradoxical organic plasticity with its monotonous but insistent groove, and "Objekt Metal" shifts from squally Electronica to dubbed up funk, before dissolving into abstraction.

Barbara Manning

1212 MATADOR

CD 221 12LP

Not a million miles from labelmate Lo Phar in arrangement and overall sound, Barbara Manning veers from confessional alternative rock ("Blood Of Feeling") to an interesting choice of covers (Tom Lehrer, Richard Thompson, Anon Davis), a bilingual motown groove ("Stammisch"), and a 19-minute song cycle ("Anson's Story"). Surprisingly it all hangs together brilliantly, a varied but seemingly assembled piece of work.

Thurston Moore & Nels Cline

In-Store WATCH IT! 17 CD

The Spines Of Oxford

The Spines Of Oxford COLORFUL 00005 FOR

acoustic crowd on 12

Recorded live at the Rhine record store in Westwood, Los Angeles, Moore and Cline practice 45 minutes of sometimes astonishing guitar improvisation. It contrasts various plateau of playing frequencies with moments of slow burning energy. There's an absence of any such dynamics on *The Spines Of Oxford*; its shimmering, cascading guitars evoke a kind of fragility bordering on the abstract, but the music doesn't progress beyond a statement of intent. Unable to progress, the music simply chooses to reiterate its opening ideas with diminishing impact.

Ototo

OCTAL SPACE ACT RECORDINGS clear

co

Hagino's Jeff Reilly gets into noisy neopyschedelia on his first solo outing as Ototo. There's plenty of sheet metal guitar, reverbs and echoing drone effects. If anything there's really a little too much of everything, as the album sprawls to a conclusion after some 70 minutes of mostly noisy guitar experimentation. The mood is more one of psychosis than psychedelia, hot without as strong points but gesturing to the point isn't one of them.

Sofa Grey

CONSTELLATION CST 002 CD

Moody stuff with bold dynamics from this Canadian four piece. Apart from the twitchy

guitar and dark atmospheres, the attention grabber is singer Brad Todd's voice. His sonorous tones are easily reminiscent of Ian Curtis. Is this an element above all which lends an extra dimension of drama to Sofa's music? Songs like the title track, "Helloine Hall" combine gloomy intimacy with occasional explosions of violence.

The Sonora Pine

II QUARTERBACK

RECORDED 0047 CD/P

A melancholy hybrid of folk and post-rock dominated by Tara Jane O'Neil's plaintive vocals and Samira Lubenski's violin, but its restless rhythmic foundation lends it an air of muscularity and tension. Traces of hardcore and the occasional mathematical rock arrangements reinforce *The Sonora Pine's* melodic strengths, while diverting the songs down unexpected avenues ("Ostalter," for instance, has a rhythmic interplay offset by an almost casual vocal treatment).

Swans

Children Of God/World

CD/S 0100 0001 001 10"

Swans

1988/1986/1987 Live Kill

The Child American 4KPS7 CD

Swans

Real Love AVA88 CD/P 008 CD

two live recordings and the best in a line of Swans releases. The latter twin the 1987 double album *Children Of God* with Michael Gira and Jarboe's two solo albums, originally released under the name *Swan*. Now on Gira's own Young God imprint, they're beautifully packaged in a gold-embossed soft cardbook design. Acoustic guitars leavened CDG signalling the end of Swans' heaviest phase. The glimmers of light here and in the *Swan* suit won't a matter of Swans getting Jesus — rather, it came from their illumination of organised religion as social control. The live recordings are essentially official bootlegs originally released to defray tour losses. Real Love especially is a brilliant raw document, every bit as brutal as Iggy's *Metallic IQ*, except Gira and Swans are very much in control. Unlike Iggy's, these mid-80s concerts were not about self-absorption, but about getting to the root of abjection. On those occasions when Gira ended them standing naked, it was because for that moment the real had nothing left to show us. (Blaa Kopt)

US Maple

Swan Phat Editor swa

CD 0001 000001 CD/P

Very messy stuff indeed, owing a little to Beefheart and a lot to persistent bloodymindedness. Songs lurch and rumble into life only to collapse, then lumber back into once again, while Al Jolson lays his weird, warbling croon over the top. It's a bit of an endurance test once the fury has worn off — about halfway through track two — and the main pleasure thereafter comes in waiting to see if they'll bunt out and conform to some recognisable musical structure. They don't. □

freefall

Clive Bell plunges through music's protecting veil and enters the realm of sonic absurdity. This month: A new dawn for hotel Muzak

Our dear guests! 1997 is a landmark year for the Bell Hotels Group. First of all — looking to the past — Bell Group is proud to be able to celebrate nearly five years of luxury hotel management. The last five years have seen huge advances in all areas of life: digital camcorders, automated toilets, bicycle suspension systems, drum 'n' bass music, and 24-hour non-stop pomo channels to name but a few, and the hotel industry has itself benefited from many of these changes. What, however, has not changed is the fundamental reason for which people use hotels: that is to say, international hotel customers require today in 1997, as they did in 1992, somewhere comfortable to sleep for the night, a choice of full English or Continental breakfast, and little pots of long-life milk in a wicker basket by the kettle. And in this respect, the aims of Bell Group have not changed either: our focus remains on offering our customers the ultimate in pampering and the highest standards of obsequious behaviour. To quote one of our early slogans, "Let us spoil you something rotten".

Secondly, to look to the future, Bell Hotels Group in 1997 plans to develop a global product line, based on considerable market research, which we believe

identifies a fascinating niche: namely facilities devoted to 'musical hospitality'. Producers and consumers of music have always been a key client sector for us; early on we realised that breakfast should be served till 4pm. We have also become known for our 'Diddy Disco' miniature discotheques, at which our guests do the DJing while the hotel staff shuffle uneasily beneath a glitterball.

Now, at the Bell Bora Bora Hotel in Tahiti, we are developing an 'Tibetan Wellness Oasis', in collaboration with a team of leading DJs, Bachelor Pad sonic designers and experts in shamanistic possession. At the Bell Bora Bora you can expect to find much more than a swimming pool, though we must mention that the pool is sand-bottomed and incorporates a coral reef. Facilities will include a Hardstep fitness studio, Ambient Trance sauna and steam bath, some massage boutique, and a genuine voodoo whirlpool. Also, unique to the Bora Bora, The Beatitude Boys Musical Beauty Suite, with individual consultation sessions, to help our guests achieve musical beauty.

Already opened this spring in Germany is the Bell Hotel Sporting Club in Baden-Baden. The Derek Bailey Suite is a deluxe nest of rooms, fully equipped with

expensive furniture, a radio and a little kitchen. The uninsured laury of the opening ceremony was timed to coincide with the International Festival Of Baileys in Baden-Baden, the annual celebration of the unmistakable avant garde guitarist, at which elegant gypsies flocked to sumptuous banquets. The already fizzing atmosphere was heightened even further by the surprise inclusion of Bailey's drum 'n' bass album on the shortlist for the prestigious Mercury Music Prize.

The Hotel Sporting Club Bar is already well known for featuring, instead of a cocktail pianist, an improvising percussionist. Hotel guests are always welcome to sing along, or to contribute an instrumental turn. Harmonicas are provided free of charge, and are indeed highly

Finally a special 'Dark Weekend' offer from the Four Seasons Bell Bora Bora Hotel on the shores of Loch Ness, Scotland: guests staying a minimum of two nights at the Bora Bora will receive a soundproof isolostation double bedroom with a view of the Loch, unlimited 'whiteout' sessions in the Black Noise Jacuzzi Suite, limousine transfer to and from Inverness docks, a free 50 CD box set of recent Japanese Noise releases, and an 'Ecoplasma Catastrophe' gastronomic dinner for two in the Merlotz Restaurant, with Deadcore DJ Leechbead and complimentary bottle of vodka.

It remains for me to thank you, dear guests, as ever for your custom. As Bell Hotels Group moves into a new era, we shall ensure that our formidable hospitality and service ethic continue to patronise you at every opportunity. □

Label distributors & contacts

Contact addresses are given for labels without named UK distributor. Labels not named here should be available from specialist retailers such as Depth Charge, Peggotty, Rough Trade, These, etc. In emergencies, contact likely distributors such as Cargo, Greyhound, Harmonia Mundi, Impetus, Kudos, Praxis, These, Viva!, etc.

333rehearsal PO Box 1172 Nuremberg, Germany

Acta through Gasteig/Innen/Theatre

Alcohol through These, Reit-Hegar

Allied PO Box 666, Station R, Montreal Quebec, Canada H3C 3T1

Allied DT through Kross, 5 Impasse Des Marais, 87 100 Limoges, France. Fax 05 55 77 42 05

Amberline *Playground* Fax 001 514 281 1884

April through 4th Dimension

Apple through Praxis

Amen through SRD

Avant through Harmonia Mundi

Bataklas Sita through Harmonia Mundi

Beatservice Fax 00 45 31 404 995

Black Saint through Harmonia Mundi

Booztling through Tresker (0171 738 5488)

Bull PO Box 2140, Jemica Plaza, Ma 0130, USA

Capitol Trip 17-17 Meiji-Koen Edogawa-ku, Tokyo, Japan

Charm Music PO Box 170277, San Francisco, CA 94117-0277 USA. Fax 415 664 1824

Chain Reaction through SRD

Compost through SRD

Colourful Clouds For Astronauts Fax 001 610 394 5195

Compound Armes, 6049 Arnes Way, Los Angeles, CA 90042

Compost through SRD

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multimedia

Scanning the interface of music and interactive media

Colcudt

Let Us Play

NINJA TUNE CD-ROM (MAC/PC)

If any of the first generation of UK cut'n'paste Electro beatmakers were going to embrace or be seduced by the wider functionality of the enhanced CD, Colcudt were. Since establishing their Thameside Ninja Tune HQ as a digital playground where they could explore both the full implications of hard disk recording and editing alongside new developments in computer graphics, sound manipulation and state of the art video, diggery policy (in their equally prominent Hex incarnation), Matt Black and Jonathan Howe have been grasping towards the multi-headed antfarm of the type that has now appeared as *Let Us Play*, this CD-ROM which comes bundled with the music CD (reviewed in Soundcheck) is better value than most (at no extra cost), containing a basic but innovative sequencing device, a quiz game, a joy-A-Z of facts you never really needed to know about Colcudt, an interactive archive of recent Colcudt film footage, and yet another virtual beatbox.

The most fun you can have on your computer when the boss isn't looking is "Playtime". Adapted from the "Synopticam" — a mixing program developed for an installation at London's Barbican Centre — this is a mixing tool with a difference. Instead of a hacked-up pair of digital decks, or a basic "mixing desk" as found on the majority of "real" yet own! CD-ROMs, the interface resembles an ancient piece of war-time hardware that might turn up at a Czech flea-market. Patched together by Hex associates Robert Pepperell and Miles Yerman, with samples supplied by Colcudt, the module lets you move a total of 17 sliders under the separate headings "Drums", "Basses" and "Head". Apart from three purple knobs under each

section, there are no further clues. In fact, this is the deal: the functions of each button aren't clearly defined, and the player's interaction with the music that emerges is not one of control; instead, the experience is being influenced and enjoyed by turns as you strive to align the sliders in such a way as to create a decent loop. The catch is that the sound changes depending on the relationships of the sliders to each other, right across the board, as well as simply their vertical positions on the instrument. Thus, you may have locked into some neat groove and want to activate some of the bell-solos/loops or cut-up voices that seem to come from the "Head" end, but moving one of the sliders even a millimetre or so seems to affect the balance of the whole thing, and you may be left with a terminally crashed beat. However, if you try to go back to the configuration you started with, it doesn't seem to be the same. In which case all you can do is click on the large knobs below, which seems to load in an entirely new set of sounds.

Even over a few hours playing it's impossible to discern many rules governing the damn thing, and that's paradoxically what holds the interest over longer periods. Once the glitches are tidied up — this is apparently a prototype for software which is intended for use when playing live — this will be a moderately significant step away from linear sequencing. For now, the wants ensure that Colcudt — not you — remain the kingfish of them all.

Most of the CDs other knobs are one-go wonders, although the Colcudt A-Z has some amazing tricks up its sleeve. However, the seven tracks for tracks on the music CD are well worth having. Not being in possession of a TV set myself, I hadn't reviewed how much the visuals complement these recent music. "Frog Jim" and "Natural Rhythm" (directed by Stuart Warren-Hill) may go down as pioneering works in manipulated sound and vision at the dawn of the digital age in the same way that Vertov's *Man With A Movie Camera*, Hans Richter's 1930s colour animation experiments and Norman McLaren's graceful camera trickery exploded film as mechanical pattern making device rather than visual narrative. On the other hand, Colcudt's more polemic tracks, such as "Timber" (featuring a crushingly haunting Amazonian female voice singing a lament as each beat sends an axe into a tree trunk), "Noah's Toilet" (a beat poem that lays into the superficial world of club culture) and

Colcudt in yr computer



"Panopcon" (samples of British environmental protesters in victory and defeat) are amplified and broadened out by their video treatments — these are miniature documents of profound unities at the heart of contemporary Britain. And in case you want to contribute to that, they've thoughtfully included a large directory of contacts for such organisations as the Centre for Alternative Technology, the Campaign for the Freedom of Information, Reclaim the Streets, and, er, the Dongus Tribe. Yes, you too can be a friend of Galle — from the comfort of your swivel chair.

ROB YOUNG
Nina Tune through Vital



Various Artists

Deep Concentration/Ass-Max
OP RECORDS NO NUMBER CD/CD-ROM

Florida's Om Records houses a bevy of karmatic caveliers such as Cut Chemist, DJ Sengen, DJ Wally, Rob Swift's X-Men, The Beat Journe, Q-Burn's Abstract Message, Peanut Butter Wolf and others. The double CD set comes with an 11 track music disc featuring the above artists as well as Prince Paul, Lynch Born and Laface, plus a second CD containing Ass-Max, a manual for DIY scratch

bombardiers. This digital beatbox is designed to enable the operator to roll out a choice of looped, funky breaks and rhythms, add pre-loaded or custom made samples, and record the lot using a simple bulk in saving device. A couple of trial sonic antenues — headed "Trappy" and, inversely, "Old School" — are included, with more available via the Om website.

A great idea, but one that here falls just short of the mark. A playback/recording interface at the bottom of the screen allows you to start up one of eight drum loops, and by mousing onto the rubbery-looking buttons on the console you activate whatever sample type you have selected. Selections are made by cranking a handle on a kind of spinning-jenny after it has stopped; this gives the impression that the choice is random, but in fact they come up in a set order. It would have been useful to have some other way of jumping directly to the selections, rather than having to crank through them all in turn. Then you can record your sounds over the drum loop. Maybe it's the machine I was using, but recording seems to slow things down significantly, and it's not so easy to play in the sounds on time. A four-slide track indicator shows you which of different coloured bars, where you have placed your instruments, but it's the devil's own work to reposition them satisfactorily once you've though and it's not uncommon for one to get lost behind another. This makes the whole process feel rigid and linear. Further irritations could have been alleviated by creating a balance control between the rhythm and the samples, and a fast forward and rewind control — the slider provided is as wayward as a supermarket trolley.

The plangent rhetoric that so often accompanies packages like this too often does itself down in the end. Notwithstanding the amount of effort that goes into coding the software, if it had been marketed as a pleasant add-on to what is a brilliant CD of music, all well and good. But the shape of things to come it ain't — mainly because, unlike Colcudt's ROM, it's a shape you can recognise and call a name.

ROB YOUNG
Om Records through Carpo

on location

Going live: festivals, concerts, clubs in the flesh

Ornette Coleman: ?Civilization?

USA. New York Lincoln Center Festival '97, Avery Hall

Ornette Coleman's *She's* Of course presents elaborate, enormous contrasts, reflecting the vista of modern music's challenges. Is it jazz? A symphony? Or something else, perhaps a face-off of proto-American iconoclasm and Western European musical manners?

By classical definition it's a concertos piece, featuring Coleman, self-described "composer-who-performs", fronting his unique double quartet Prime Time along with a conventional orchestra (The New York Philharmonic, conducted by Kurt Masur). Yet *She's* only rarely lets its full forces conjure. Whimsical themes come and go from the score like pinpricks, sometimes subtle, again like blips through like wisps on the wind, and the oppositions occasionally

brew out in tempests of fiery, lousy polyphony. Participating musicians, sound engineers, and audiences alike are asked to suspend their listening assumptions and adopt tolerance. If not accept a conclusively new aesthetic.

She's, first presented in 1972, is cast off "Civilization?" four nights of Coleman's humdrumness in pieces as it turns evolving the Lincoln Center's second annual summer festival of new and unusual international performances. Scheduled with Morton Subotnick's vast state-of-the-synthesizer extravaganzas and music theater productions including a one-man *Hiroshima* and cast-of-hundreds black South African *Moors*, *Aykelion*? composed besides Coleman's most ambitious composed work, a sublime set with his career-long associates Charlie Haden and Billy Higgins, and a high concept *Tone Painting* circus with others—including Lee Reed and Laurre Anderson.

The four performances proved to be as shocking, affecting and subject to furious debate as Coleman has been since his first appearances in New York, nearly 40 years

ago. Sights of built pyramids of drums, spectral and heavy chimes, at nearly 70, Coleman played a white piano—exacted also sax, trumpet and voice, every gesture and utterance clear despite the acoustic pitfalls of the banjo-like Avery Fisher Hall.

She's was originally recorded in part by the London Philharmonic, with Coleman as a guest, shortly after its premiere, and was revised by John Giacope, conductor of The Symphony Orchestra Of Fort Worth, Texas (Ornette's hometown) in the 1980s. This version Coleman resolved for Masur's interpretation seemed abundantly weighty yet still composed by time constraints on preparation (three days) and the orchestra's reluctance to tackle Coleman's fundamental theory, attacking players' unusual liberties and responsibilities. And ensemble balance was a problem, as the wobbly, long, high clangor hall favored the strings, timpani, woodwinds and brass set horns of the orchestra, but rendered Dave Bryant's electric keyboards, Chris Rossington and Kenny Werner on electric guitars, Albert McEowen and Brad Jones on electric and double basses, respectively, Basal Royal's tubas and Dennis Coleman's top drums visage and distant.

Aaron Copland's *For The Common Man* was a fit appetizer for *She's*, and Coleman chose brief dramatic medleys from Martha Graham, Pentecost preacher Jonathan Edwards,

Walt Whitman and Langston Hughes, among others, to set and/or foreshadow the composition. Then Saia announced itself with the sort of densely stretched, vocale depictions of human character and feeling that have always typified Coleman's art. The strings carried the initial orchestral passages above an unending brittle snare pulse, dappled with low brass and woodwinds, topped by muted high trumpets, then the theme, which had accumulated some power, tested it with a lift of dynamic page before returning to an elegant pose on the basis of half-drawn walking basses. Following a breath length pause Coleman charged in, tenaciously, on alto with Prime Time keenly active yet acoustically as disembodied as ghosts behind him. The juxtaposition was almost comic; gone was the sonic symphonic vocabulary Coleman adopted from early 20th century American neoclassical composers like Copland, Roy Harris et al., replaced by his idiosyncratically personal reappreciation of musical timbres and ensemble dynamics, interactions and reflections, released by a self-contained commando unit of freed improvisers.

Audience applause after each of Prime Time's sections emphasized the blocky structure of the *She's*, interrupting

Lou, Laurie and Ornette





Si Begg

whatever flow Masur and Coleman might otherwise have accomplished — yet, the Silesian-born, Leipzig-educated, globally renowned maestro gazed, capered, danced, willed the visibly addled Philharmonic players through Coleman's syncretic, looping rhythms, horny angularities and nursery-rhyme or folk-inspired riffs, such as "Dancing In Your Head." Other familiar strains of Coleman's oeuvre emerged, including "What Reason Could I Give?", and on successive nights, Omerte alluded briefly on sax to "The Star Spangled Banner." Yet his magnificently opulent, less fed, and finished than in continual process, particularly when Prime Time's configurations came into account. This is a different group than the BBS Prime Time with Jamaiadaeum Tacoma, Ben Na and Cherie Elieetee. Its members refer less to pop soul, and are more self-conscious about their individual contributions to the whole spinning ball of wax.

If Ses sometimes seemed static, it rewarded patient contemplation; like star- or cloud-gazing its latter episodes orgiastically repeated and refined, rather than advanced, as its argument, but by then Prime Time and Omerte were wound up and Masur was attuned to cueing in the optional symphonic bustle.

Most of Coleman's fans love his big pieces less than his more intimate settings, though, and he could hardly have given them a greater gift than the first half of "Civilization?" — normally "acoustic jazz" concert. Perched on a stool with instruments close at hand, utterly exposed without mediating constraints of form or content, Coleman and his peers Haden and Higgins conversed at the highest level of intuitive musical communication, effortlessly and spontaneously in perfect balance, with sublime sass and no pretensions, affirming life by distilling the beauty of each moment in an eternal hour. It was heaven. The hell half was conquered. Coleman's roving, earth-anchored saxophone was audible in its quietest offhand comments, whether loaning bottom line truths, or moaning, chugging, confessing the blues, or offering the consolations of upward, yearning phrases and wondrous, floating segs.

Sell-out attraction! Omerte indulged no gratuitous honk or superfluous trill. Haden exhibited an immense, solidly woody tone and immaculate time. Higgins, lately recovered from a liver transplant, gave life to divine, propulsive rhythms with stocks, mallets and

brushes. No tune titles were announced, but the musicians were well versed in Coleman's hopped-up hopes, hypnotically winding lines and bouncy walks, motifs that launched almost a dozen separate two nights of grafting discovery.

After the intermission, trumpeter Wallace Roney sought to contend with the legacy of Don Cherry, capturing some of the much-missed pocket trumpet's gestures but not his playfulness or invention. Pianist Kenny Barron extended Bud Powell's probing articulations to Coleman's looser notions of harmony and collective impetus. Omerte revealed his love of Eckstine-era roadhouse crooning and his interest in Ellingtonian chamber jazz by introducing smooth balladeer Chris Walker, an ex-Prime Time bassist, and a woman singer (name TK) with a classical diction and strong intonation, who shared a saxy love song. The instrumentalists responded with Coleman's riff-based "The Turnaround," like it was "C-Jam Blues."

After the tussles of Coleman's reunion trio and Ses of America, "Civilization?" Tone Duvalle finally set in anti-climactic. Omerte and Prime Time dove eagerly enough into their current repertoire, which boasts scope and complexity that are seriously underestimated. Superficially released, the funk rhythms are at core hot and grinding, the overexuberant simile themes perpetuate labyrinths of possibilities, the chaotic ring arrangements are actually transparent and lucid. The musicians were impassive and dancers, consonants, performers jumping on broken glass, a relentless film clip montage of exotic curiosities and atrocities, and guitar slabs by Lou Reed (whose pseudo punk mumble and base rock chord progression reduced Prime Time to the role of garage rehearsal backup band) and radiant Lauré Anderson (whose voice-processing synth-speech breached a compelling affinity with Coleman's sets) through the miasma of the whole group!

Though dizzying, such trappings enhanced Coleman's music most by casting it in strong relief. He stands as an antithesis to the contemporary, presumably non-ideological yet highly commercialised sensory overload, his music the balm for such bombardment. "Civilization?" — that's a really big question. Omerte Coleman? He aspires to the lightness and dark, the diaphanous and breadth of the stars.

HOWARD MANHIL

A Taste Of Wonderland

UK: London Ministry Of Sound

An, a dumbshow — now that's entertainment! In the middle of the floor in the largest of the Ministry Of Sound's three shapeless spaces, the Queen Of Hearts, on stilts, is waging the mother of all croquet matches against a smelly shit-mounted, pouting opponent. A living deck of cards is bending over backwards — literally — to ensure the Queen wins. They've been "painting the roses red all over the Henley as well" the dancefloor has been tickled out with mild hallucinogenic froid (nauseously discoloured) paper mache flora, polystyrene foliage and plaster tree stumps — the kind of decor favoured by now defunct clubs like Megatrons, where clubbers used to kid themselves they were getting roddy.

Right, and I'm Henry Thoreau. In the course of this season of one of London's largest temples of boom by Electronica labels Wars, Mosquitos and their various brothers and sisters in arms, you find many of the reasons why UK electronic music seems to be running so diggily on the spot. Two of its most interesting and productive directions were polarised at the event to preview for a full UK tour the coming autumn: the rugged territory of Richard James, Tom Jenkinson and their crew at one end, and the husky-dishy math-jigour of Cristian Vogel's Brighton squiddies. It's all in the decor: the previously mentioned plastic foliage provided the Higgs Roundabout-like setting for the Warp axis Simon Pyke, aka Freeform, has been disconnected from the national power grid for a week, and therefore hasn't been able to prepare much music for tonight's show. Instead he's scratch-built a pack-off the top of his head, impressing around one of his odd, galactic-wobble rhythms on a powerful sampling drum machine. It would be nice to see other closet programmers take their cool reps in their hands like this — people like Richard D James, for instance. Five years

down the line from his arthritic opening gambits such as "Analogue Bubblebabb" and "We Are The Music Makers," he appears to be stuck in an emotional and intellectual vacuum. The music he's spinning tonight is mostly characterless, unfunny drudge, and if any of it was his own, it's getting increasingly difficult to spot. What he and the Rephlex Records posse — a strange looking bunch who have come to fetchise uses computer technology — really want is to have a good laugh and it's crackles aplenty when Tom Jenkinson operates the decks while White Aphex hid in the DJ booth, Jenkinson has to be placed in full view so that the crowd can get the full benefit of his smarm antics. Usually it's unpleasant to watch performers having more fun than anyone else in the building, but Si Begg's stage rives are genuinely infectious.

Worshipping the pitch with a permanent ear-to-ear grin on his mug, Tom goes through short segments of fantastic Techno, classic Acid and breakbeat tracks (including the Toytown rave favourite "Trip To Trumpton") while filling in time with such BBS older-brother tracks by Ultravox, MC Hammer, Bros and The Police's "Walking On The Moon." It's currently going the key elements of the flagging sparky jazz scene who've convened here tonight, a run for three minor Hardy, from the Spymania label, is chicken dancing down the front for god's sake. In the beleagued British Techno scene, Jenkinson's set is an oasis of disorder.

Well, almost becalmed! At the far end of the Ministry, Si Begg is preaching a new order from two decks in a high pulpit (albeit one festooned with a prominent drink company logo). If some factors seem about to isolate themselves by their sheer goofy aloofness, Begg and his friends Cristian Vogel and Justin Berlow seem driven by a zeal not often seen on these shores. For anyone (myself included) conditioned to viewing most DJing as a secondary art, Begg's set — a bumpy, high-altitude ride at



Tom Jenkinson

on location

near heartbeat rate — is a major brain bummer. Likewise, the following frantic live set by Justin Berkov doesn't impose too-down discipline on the assembled listeners, but excites the metabolism and induces the desire for change, which is selected by his improvised, almost casual flips of the riters. The dancers' win! and corous, celebrates at this secular ritual of release, then they mysteriously clear out before Cristian Vogel's appearance. Only in England could someone like Vogel empty a room, which is presumably why he finds a more receptive home at Berlin's Tresor label. After a furrowed-brow, perfunctory-shit intro, Vogel launches a volley of beats that chop at the feed like bastardines, complemented by video loops of precision tooling, hi-tech medicinal educational films and mass land clearance. It's a pray the powerful vision that Vogel's outfit is developing was relegated to a sideshow.

BOB YOUNG

The Planet Alice tour visits venues around the UK in October

Trafics Festival

France Nantes L'Usine Lu

A mere Eurostar ride away from London, in Nantes, deep in Muscadet country, the Trafics Festival offers a seemingly irresistible combination of international performance and cuisine. Taking place in a former biscuit factory, L'Usine Lu is a Peter Bevan's throw from Nantes Cathedral. Five stages, five kitchens, rock, cabaret, noise, Ambient, theatre and performance art are thrown with abandon into the soup and served up in a vast banqueting arena. At the very least, it's a good excuse for getting pissed and listening to some live music. If I wanted, I could even pretend it was work.

I arrive to find my French is shot to pieces. It doesn't seem to matter, no one knows what's going on anyhow. There are no signs as to who's playing and when, acts suddenly appear on stage and perform unannounced. I'm so late I have missed Joseph Racaille. Some art student types start flinging a pig's head about and injecting an animal heart with Coca-Cola. Oh dear. An hour later, Joseph Racaille

appears and makes me wish I had missed him. The former Sabot-esque prankster has turned into a noisy burlesque hootie. I retreat to study some menus. Away from the diners, guitarist Keith Rowe has teamed up with American saxophonist Jeffrey Morgan. Their playing is a finely judged and self-effacing model of subtlety and control. Based down the road in Vannes, Rowe is busy becoming a local celebrity as this and that French group absent-mindedly cite AMM as an inspiration. The longer the festival goes on, he's forced to issue more and more disclaimers.

Back to the table to chat, sharing plates of stuck insects, oysters, creme brulee and cheap local wine. As usual, in idle moments I find myself checking out where the power points are, counting the number of staff, enviously drawing up rough budgets and spotting gaping holes in the fabric of the event. There are several dozen acts, but no women performers, although Brent Daniels's unutterably dice show features a naked "moodo" who stands pointlessly spouting come-stage. "Not now, cheesecake," the guy in the group seems to be saying as he sniffs and poses before us. It's exasperating. A white-faced clown troupe, in a festoval that's uniformly — arably — Caucasian.

Incomprehensibly prance on and clutch at their groins until the audience segres to complain and bang their cutlery. A man with a startling resemblance to Bonny Hill comes on in a dress and shows videos of starving refugees and of his own enormous gob being force-fed spaghetti while he berates us about the war in Bosnia. It's beyond disastrous.

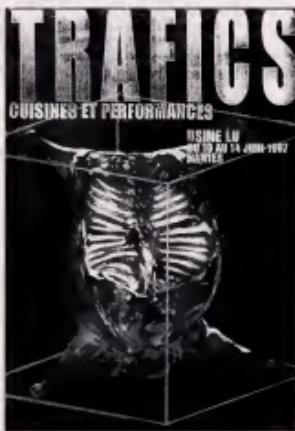
When a film crew wheels towards us, throwing images of diners up onto the screen, I ready myself for a fight.

I'm choking on my own chauvinism when a smiling Frenchman us down and gives me a cassette. He English is worse than my French, but we smile and shout at one another above the din, as though anything will come of this transaction. "Yeah, great, merci!" I'm hungry, so we buy more wine. ZGA, lying in from St Petersburg, haven't shown up. German noise terrorists Faust perform breathlessly on one stage, emerging as if from a mid-'70s time capsule in half French avant rockers Ulan Bator; their professional rock body language

learned from Sonic Youth, play alongside one another. It's hard to tell what's what. The heat from the kitchens is stifling. Is this a concert, you eat at or a food fair with music? In the stalls they broadcast the local radio station, whose interviews with the performers are taking place in front of a kinetic artwork some way off. The artwork, lots of wooden crates filled with stones, is so loud that nothing else can be heard. Everyone continues chatting like it's not really there.

Next day ZGA have arrived. I don't show up in time to hear them. Les Teines Noires seem to be performing every night and I seem unable to avoid them. They are the world group I have ever heard in my life. They are described in the programme as a performance group who have chosen to use rock music as a vehicle for their art, or some such ditch, which only makes me dislike them even more intensely. I have to leave the building to get away from them and sit on the fire escape by the dustbins to calm down. As I go, I hear someone say their leader is related to one of the organisers.

David Thomas & Two Pale Boys promise welcome relief, but the mix sounds like it is being lit through caramel custard, rendering Thomas's charming stories inaudible. Thoroughly bored by the carlessness, I retreat upstairs instead to find Charlemagne Palestine. Dressed in a baseball cap and some of Eugene Chadbourne's cast-offs, he vis at a Borsodion piano and a throng of about 300 cuddly toys, some gigantic, most small and arranged shoulder to shoulder. Charlemagne's dense chord clusters, brain-soothing overtones and nasal wails send me off into a dream of



childhood, its harsher features erased, its sharp edges rendered harmless.

After his performance we talk, or at least Charlemagne does, as we trade swigs on a bottle of cognac, describing his warehouse full of soft gods, home of the dumb, obedient idols whose presence in the pantheon embodies the weird kind of cool that the sweaty audience can only envy. Palestine is in residency here and on a roll. He enthuses about his work about Europe, about the giggling girls who walk away from the massed ranks of teddy bears. I pretend, but I can't quite reach him in his realm of infectious wonder. Sensing my spiritual vacuity will not be filled by bratty aliens, he drives me over to the side of the stage and plucks a toy from his collection. "Here — give this to someone you love!" He presses a felt and satin bear into my hand. I nod gratefully and depart. Later, in the early hours, I give it to Keith Rowe's dog.

ED BAXTER

Silver Apples DJ Tim Gane Snarkiste

THEATRE DE L'USINE LU 19 SEPTEMBER / 97

SCRATCH #17

new notes at a glance

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14

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New music books — read, raved about, ransacked

Space Is The Place: The Lives And Times Of Sun Ra

By John F Sawed.

PAPERBACK PRESS £12.99

On the occasion of the Apollo 11 moon landing — the first time human feet touched down on a celestial body outside of earth — Sun Ra was a prominent enough figure for *Esquire* magazine to ask him for a public statement, alongside Muhammad Ali, WH Auden, Truman Capote, Ed Koch, Kurt Vonnegut, Isaac Asimov, Robert Graves and other shining lights in the worlds of art and politics. "Reality has couched against myth," he wrote in a trenchant, single free verse stanza. "Humanity can move to achieve the impossible. Because when you've achieved the impossible the others come together to be with their brother, the first impossible. Borrowed from the rim of the moon. Happy Space Age To You."

That word "impossible" is important because, as this extraordinary, absorbing and long overdue account of the life and vision of Sun Ra reveals, he viewed the whole seeming, tangled world of myth as a smoking volcano, and something had chosen him to make it erupt. The much misunderstood career of Herman "Sonny" Blount, the cues, hemmed-racked bookworm from Birmingham, Alabama, only begins to make sense in the context of the religious, hermetic and apocalyptic strain of secret history and prophecy in which he had immersed himself than an era ago, but public critics, commentators or biographers have seen fit to plunge into the mystery of Master Ra.

John F Sawed, Professor of Afro-American Studies, Music and American Studies at Yale University, and a long-time worshipper at the temple of Ra, has tackled the subject head-on by following in Sonny's intellectual footsteps. The force of this is to locate Sun Ra once and for all as a keystone in the dissemination of the marginalized black versions of history which filtered into the public domain during the 60s and 70s via the azto-black arts of John Coltrane, Jimi Hendrix, Miles Davis, Parliament/Funkadelic (and beyond) to their descendants, the producers with "The Knowledge" in black forms of Baco, Hip-Hop and Techno, and the fervent esoterism of

today's cosmic jazz masters David S Ware, Charles Gayle, William Hooker and their acolytes. On all these, Le Sun' has burnt his mark.

Sawed may be an academic, but he doesn't write like one, and the book is the better for it. Neither does he drop his guard, as the majority of white respondents to Sun Ra, and portray him as some kind of freak, a nutter, ringmaster at the psychedelic circus. Instead, he demonstrates how hard-won was Sun Ra's notorious fame. Following a detailed account of Sonny's spell in what was effectively an American concentration camp for wartime conscientious objectors — apparently the biggest single crisis of his life, which set the seal on his

subsequent outsider status — and some kind of half-remembered out-of-body or abduction experience, it took nine years from the end of the war until 1954, for him to have clocked up enough swing-hours with Fletcher Henderson in Chicago (Henderson played the role of an angel in Ra's life), one-off dates with rising jazzmen, and in his own trio, before his first notions of the broad church that would become The Arkestra began to emerge. Even then, this first octet was told, things "would be different". This band would not make money; they might have to rehearse five, maybe ten years before they would be ready to play in public. Like a space age Noah, he told them that he wanted them to help him prepare what was coming.

After a further seven years, Sonny — now with birth certificate altered to read Le Son'y Ra — arrived in New York to fulfil his destiny. We see a practical side to Ra's "otherness" as well as his spiritual heroics; he was among the first to adopt synthesizers and invented electronic instruments, integrate the process of tape recording into the business of



Le Son'y Ra

rehearsing and performing, and distribute his own music on his home-grown E Saturn imprint. Then, through interviews with surviving group members — he called them "tone scientists" — Sawed pieces together The Arkestra's slow, eventful progress and gentle rise to prominence through the 70s to Ra's departure from the planet in 1993.

If anything, the book doesn't go far enough during this later section. Sawed is so good on Sun Ra's early reading and research that you're dying to get a sense of the territory he moved into during the last half of his career (the manner of Sun Ra's unusual passport, and the nature of secret documents which were delivered to him during a visit to Turkey, remain tantalising mysteries). But there is consolation in an almost verbatim account of a lecture series which Ra gave to students at Berkeley in 1971, and more analyses of Sun Ra's complex semantic play, poetry-writing, some of which is reproduced here.

theories of "end-time", and (towards the end of his life) foreign travel to the ancient archaeological sites of Egypt and Mexico.

This is a formidable study that has been crying out for an equally formidable chronicle. Sawed's attention to detail has produced a volume that will act as a fascinating springboard to alternative channels through world history and modern music alike. To this book of revelation, then, a resounding amen.

All American Music By John Rockwell

DA CAPO/PBS £14.95

The Mayflower had hardly landed when the Americans began promoting their New Frontier mythology. And here is John Rockwell, some 300 years later, singing the same tune. "As a society built upon the very

PHOTO: ALBERT WINTER

ideas of ecumenicalism and catholicity; as the leading technological and industrial nation of our time, and as the principal nexus between European high art and the musics of other classes and cultures, America stands at the forefront of the music of tomorrow. I've already heard some of that music, and I'm here to tell you it's terrific."

Well, the odd quibbles aside — leading technological and industrial nation? Criminally wasteful First World bubbles is how others might see it — many of us are still prepared to buy into the myth on the very strength of the musics Rockwell references. His subtitle reads: *Composition in The Late 20th Century*; indeed, music most everywhere in the world would be incompossible without the impact of American energy and imagination, the tremendous vitality of its popular culture (from jazz through Hollywood to every kind of rock), its downright cussedness and its mythical pioneering spirit. But you don't have to be a ravaging pisko comme fag to find Rockwell's flagwaving a little quaint, to say the least.

Culled from his journalism in *The New York Times* for which he wrote about classical and rock music in the 70s, *All American Music* was originally published in 1983. Remaining true to his day job's twin tasks, his original introduction outlines a populist agenda which is pursued across 20 chapters, each headed by a representative artist. His opening salvo is as absurdly protectionist as the current administration's policy on anyone who does business with Cuba. Focusing on Kurt Weill's contemporary, the German emigre Ernst Krenek (composer of *Jonny Spielt Auf*), his first chapter tackles the cultural inferiority complex of US composers we a/w their European counterparts, many of whom — Schoenberg, Weill, etc. — crossed the Atlantic to escape Nazi persecution. There's a point to be made here, but the failing is all-American if this music feels intemperate, maybe it just isn't good enough to compete with the Europeans! If Schoenberg and the later Serialists held too much sway over US artists, maybe the latter had neither the courage nor the imagination to shift positions from under its great weight. To attack the emigres now is carelessly to extend across time and space the persecutions that took them to America in the first place.

Later, he valuably tries to bring more difficult figures — Astley, Babbitt, Cage, Carter — into popular orbit. But even when his championing of 'difficulty' is sourced by his chestnut of, say, Milton Babell for resolutely refusing to torture the common man and instead wilfully pursuing his singular, unswerving vision. In Rockwell's skewed view, the composer's neglect of the needs and tastes of the congealing audience raises the issue of who pays for such artistic license. Essays on the aforementioned Babell, Ralph Richter and the more approachable tonal composer David Del Tredici delve into the problems of public money, private patronage and commercial solutions, and how chasing means of support might influence their

directions. Yet these are local battles of more interest to American readers, perhaps. And, for all their cultural-historical interest, they're maimed by the author's lack of generosity towards anyone prepared to risk leaving a popular audience behind. How about artistic vision, John? Not every music is for everyone and there is nothing elated in artists wanting to realize their own singular visions. During its fulfilment any other considerations are of absolutely no account, and it's down to critics to explore and espouse notions of 'difficulty', thereby opening the music up to its largest potential audience by underscoring a composition's great and various exuberances. Sad to say, Rockwell's middlebrow prose is a little too enervated and dispassionate, either to intellectually engage his readers with the music or generate much of an emotional response.

In terms of the book's structure, things get worse as the century progresses. His attempts to convince his more effete *New York Times* readership of the value of downtown experiment, downtown jazz and downmarket rock might well have been useful from a local perspective. But if it means he has to overcompensate for non-classical music's simplicity by condescendingly playing up its emotional connection with a broader public, then the view from below ought to be, get back upstair and take your academic lobsters with you. The Pimlico chapter headed by Philip Glass — a revealing choice, why not lead with the more rigorous Terry Riley? — and another on Louie Anderson bridge the classical and the popular under the rubric of art music. Meanwhile, Orlando Coleman and The Art Ensemble Of Chicago represent jazz and improvisation. These latter sections are cursory, to say the least, and even worse are the Neil Young and Talking Heads chapters on rock. Here, the limitations of Rockwell's original intent, and his refusal to revise and update the book, are most cruelly exposed. For one, the book potentially addresses a far wider audience than *The New York Times*, so arguments about selection on the grounds that these are names his readers can concur with are somewhat futile. And any book that reduces The Velvet Underground to an extended footnote in a Talking Heads-led chapter on art rock has made an absurd error of judgment that ought to have been corrected in the second edition.

But the only new writing this edition offers is a preface that mumbles something about not wanting to spoil the integrity of the original as a document, both of the century's music and the database that were current when he was putting it together. Glumming his lament was to break down the barriers separating serious and popular music cultures, his fear is now that the popular lobby has won, making it even harder for supposedly difficult artists, be they jazz, noise, experimental or new composers. Well, it's your victory, John. Enjoy it.

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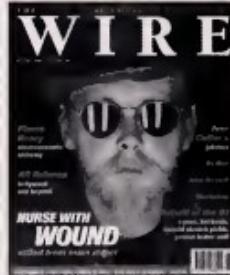
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WIRE

david toop

at the court of Korean kings

Strange items caught my eye in recent issues of this very magazine: not so much that five page feature devoted to the Derek Bailey/John Lee Hooker duo album, Hooker playing in a hi-tech studio in San Francisco and Bailey sitting in his rocking chair on the back porch in Clapton prokin' on a big ole' Eaphone, the two of them linked via ISDN lines, bounced off the buggy on Mars and back down to the new Digital Jukebox service that delivers albums as they are made, or even before.

Nor was it the *Hello!*-style picture story, shot by Araku, that took up an unnecessary ten pages just to detail the minutiae of Björk recording with Merzbow in a secret studio in Kinsasha.

Nope. First it was a passing reference to "child haters" that drilled my brain pan. Then it was the dedication of the entire last issue to newborn babies with Wire affiliations. The "taking a stand on children" business left me in a state of shock. I just don't expect it from a music magazine. I mean, music fans; if they have children they keep them in the attic to make room for more CD shelves. If they don't have children then they spend their lives in states of bafflement, wondering why some people are so much shorter than others, why they ride about in plastic cars with no engines, why they wear nappies and why they can't hum "Good Vibrations".

Fact is, the child thing changes your perspective drastically. Just to write this column I had to go through a two-bar system of negotiation this morning with the seven year old who adds a grid of order to my life. She being on summer holiday and me being in one of the busiest work phases of my year means that the act of switching on the computer and starting to write is the major achievement, content is an afterthought.

Though if we're going to bring children into the magazine then I can say that two recent experiences are relevant. I'm not much of a concertgoer anymore but free tickets were offered for two events within days of each other. Juliette may be seven years old but she's seen everything from Cambodian court music to sound poetry. I figured, she's ready for the whole 'sit down in a seat for two halves and an interval and listen quietly' business.

Decorum and quiet were not strictly necessary at the first show, which happened to be Michael Jackson at Wembley Stadium. Yes, yes, yes. I know what you're thinking: how could he? In truth, if I had been the reporter with the notebook that I once was, I too could have written one of those deliriously spiteful reviews

God knows, there was a plethora of material both barking mad and rabble.

But there you are, sitting next to your darling child, light of your life, who may not have much interest in Michael Jackson per se, but who is pretty thrilled with the sensation of sitting among so many people, hearing so many explosions and drinking so much Diet Coke. No, this is not a sharp laser of criticism, though neither were any of the reviews I read, any and every bilious point they made could be heard in a pub or street anywhere, given out ad nauseum by unpaid amateurs without the need for press tickets and hospitality area passes.

What's to say about Michael Jackson? He's bonkers. Everybody knows it. Yet people like him. His true habitat is the stage. Elsewhere he is lost.

I thought about that a lot in the few days before our next outing, which happened to be something completely different. If I had to make a Top 100 singles of all time list (and I assume that thousands of 'enthusiasts' are doing just that on their own websites right now) then Michael Jackson's "Rock With You" would be in it.

Top 100 albums would have to include the late John Levy's recordings of Korean court music, made in Seoul in the late 60s. Levy was one of the great recordists of Asian music. "Nothing sounds quite in tune," he wrote about Confucian shime music, "and one must enjoy these deliciously archaic sounds in the same way that both the Chinese and the Koreans do, that is to say, with a sort of evergreen youthful gaiety."

Listening to ancient Korean music such as A-ak and Saejeon fills me with a searing sensation of eating raw ginger and garlic while being beaten with brambles in a rhythm that would make a tortoise seem quick. Though I don't pursue that particular path in my sex life, I do enjoy it in music. Juliette doesn't yet have a sex life, of course, nor much experience of Courticism, so I wondered how she might take to an evening of Korean traditional music and dance at the South Bank.

Ominously, the evening began with a speech delivered by an ambassador. This was followed by the first group, playing my beloved Saejeon at glorifying slow pace. For a child this must be a bit like being made to eat broccoli followed by cabbage. I feared the worst: shuffling in seat, chronic boredom symptoms, disruption, even an international incident.

Fortunately, we were saved by some loud drumming and choreographed folk dancing, along with a fan



Wreck

dance in the style of Busby Berkeley — items that could spoil my evening in normal circumstances. In the interval we commenged with a critic not unknown to these pages. Seeking to distract Juliette from the blatant theft of her crops, he asked her for a ruling on who, or what was best: Michael Jackson or seventh century Korean music.

She gave the nod to Korea, which could prove a lot or nothing. Maybe she's already learned how to schmooze Wire critics. Maybe she's set aside a strictly limited store of responses designed to humour me in lieu of some Spice Girls tickets in the future. Or maybe Michael's military marching and explosions just didn't match up to the pungent charms of a Korean dirge. Search me, children don't elaborate a great deal when it comes to comparative musicology. I put it down to evergreen youthful gaiety. □



AMAMPONDO

Dances For Tomorrow (MELT)

Albanian shaman and gypsy-pianist Mihailo Arsen South Africa, each taught by their apprentices the skills passed down from their elders who knew how to move directly and make different sounds. During certain sessions after hours of dancing in the forest, they make a hypnosis of consciousness, at which point they are able to communicate back to their community in a way that directly affects our dreams. As our dreams are un-cool, they can however, even in this higher state, ask their questions like the ones we do every day and need to know. Amongando is dance and percussions as a way of life. A must for the dedicated.

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BYRON WALLEN

Earth Roots (MELT)

Acrobatically talented composer and multi-instrumentalist Byron Wallen gives us his second album, 'Earth Roots...', a journey through the sounds of Asia, American Indians, African and Arabic cultures. With the feel of an epic soundtrack, this is a journey which needs to be experienced fully, with the likes of the stellar voices of Harry Belafonte, Joni Mitchell and Miles Davis like dispensable jazz butterflies around, beats, poetry & music meshing together fluidly and... *Melodic roots*.

Double album dispensable jazz butterflies around, beats, poetry & music meshing together fluidly and...
Melodic roots.



BRICE WASSY

Shrine Dance (MELT)

Following an incredidle career responding and touring with Miles Davis, Takao Nagai, Steve Lacy, John Zorn, Steve Reich, Michael Minkler, drummer percussionist Brice Wassy steps forth with a dynamic and colourful contemporary afro-jazz album, with the funk bass and new groove blessed with 'electic booy' - effects, 'Shrine Dance' illustrates Brice's African Rhythms and wickedly naiital body percussions.

Inspired by such other greats as the inimitable effects of a night in Pela Rotta's Lagos music club and the Africanic dance rhythms of Cameroun 'Shrine Dance' is state of the art afro-jazz cool.

Performers: Steve Williams, Byrne Wallen, Michael Minkler, Graham Haynes, Arts, Bradley Jacky & Cheungs &c.



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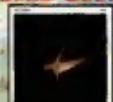
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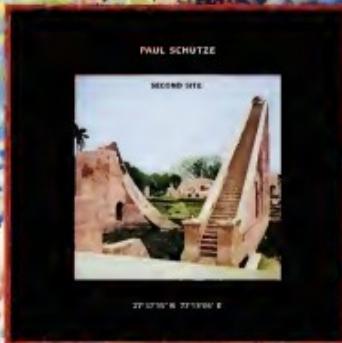
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